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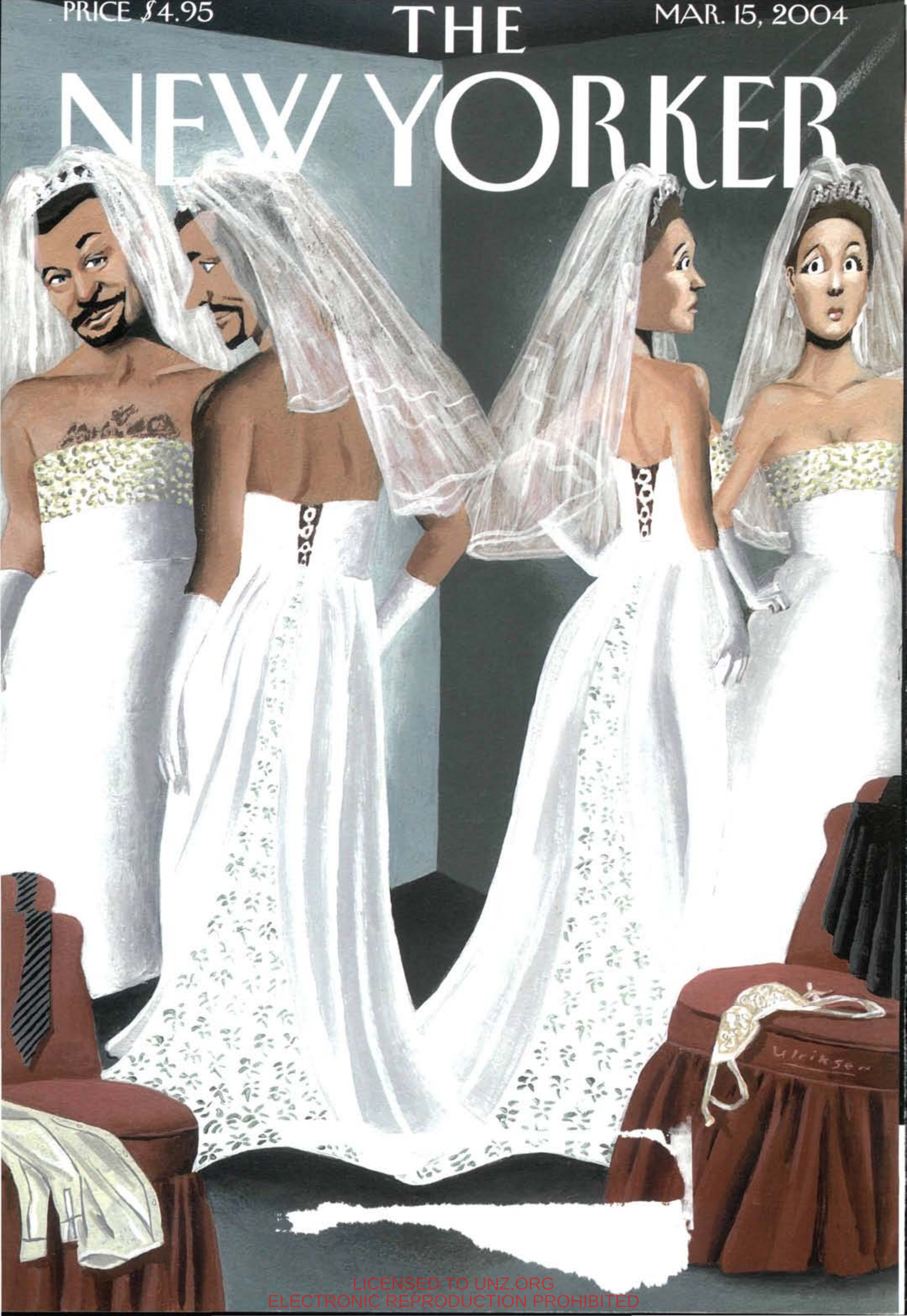

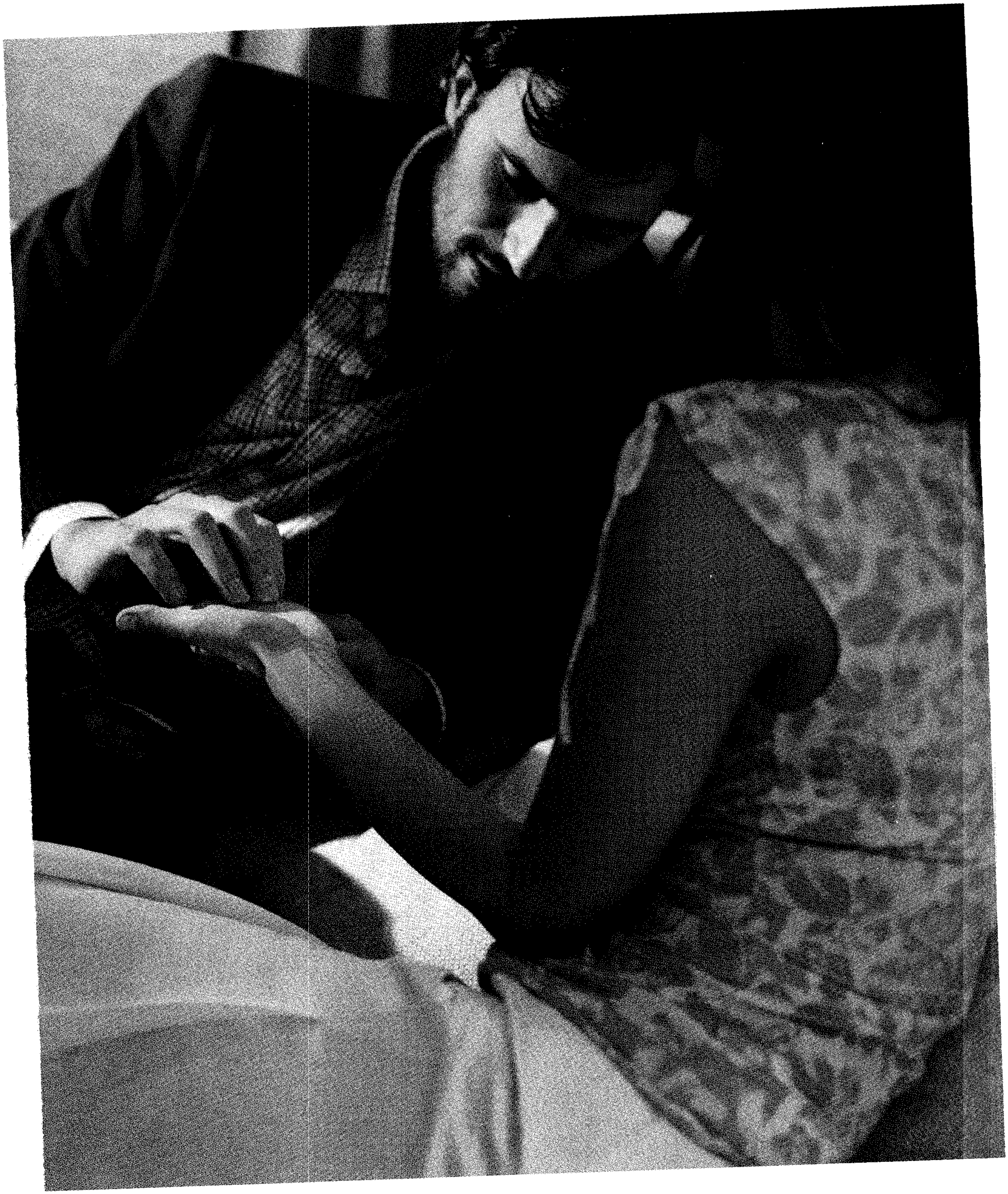

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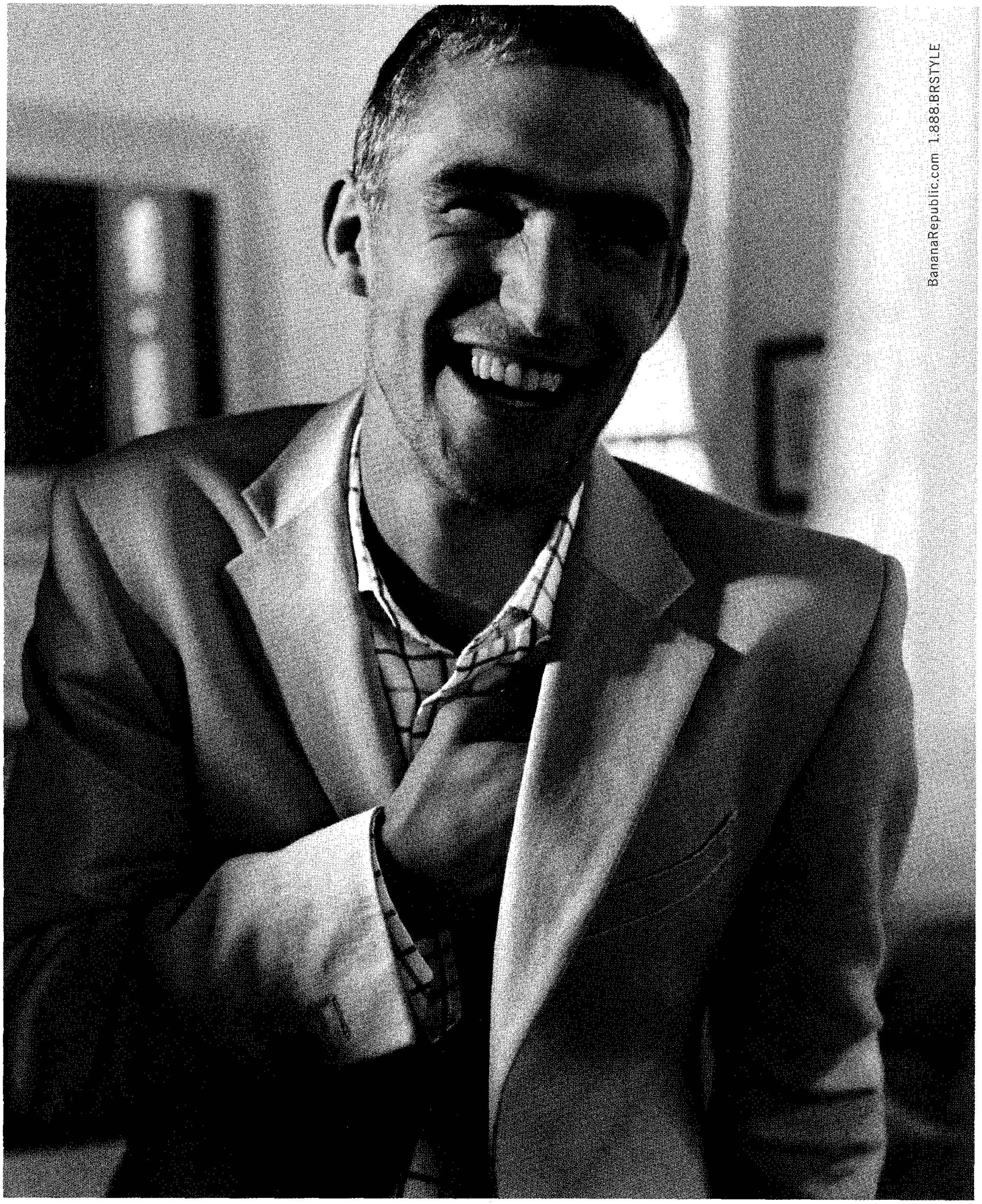
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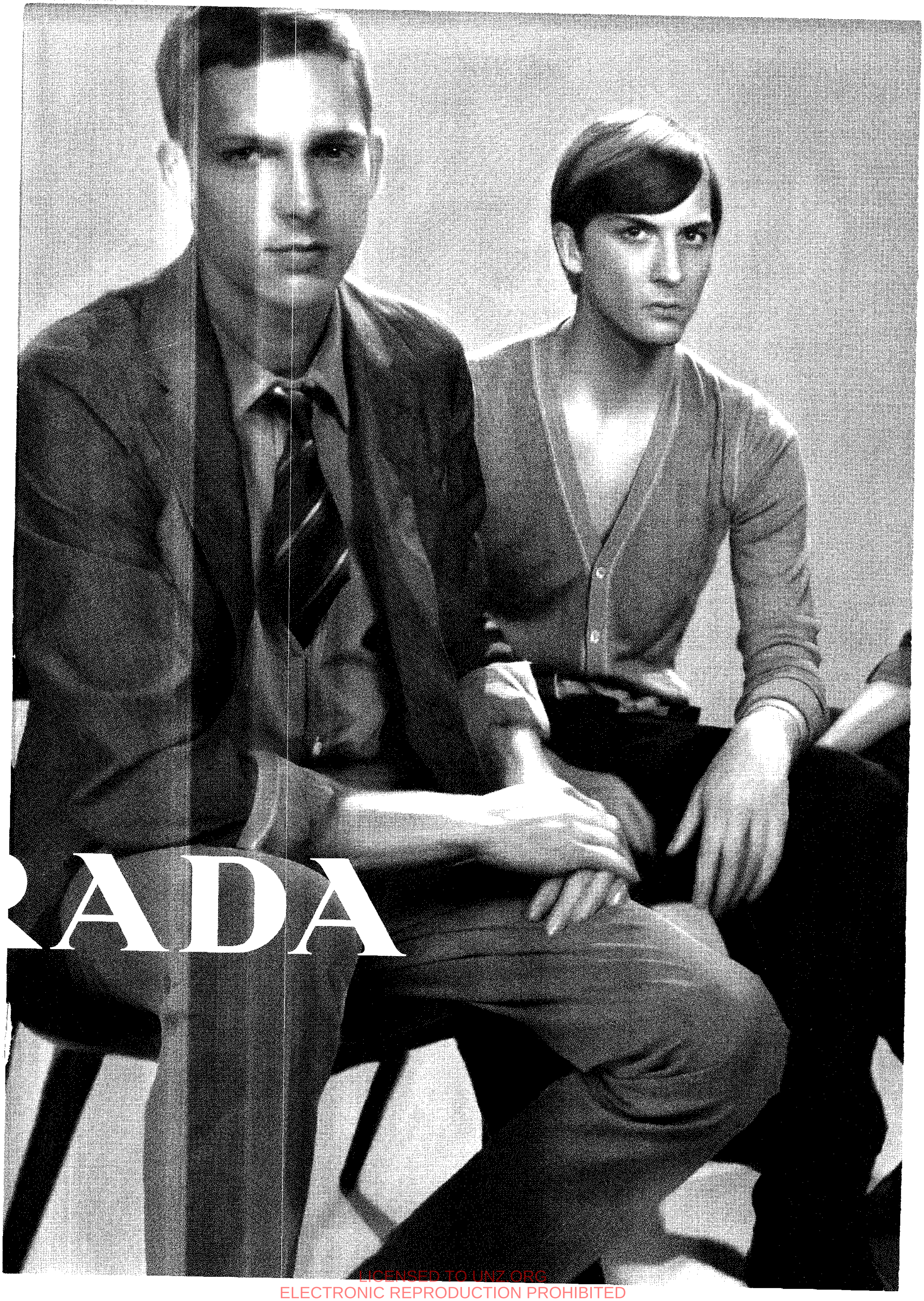
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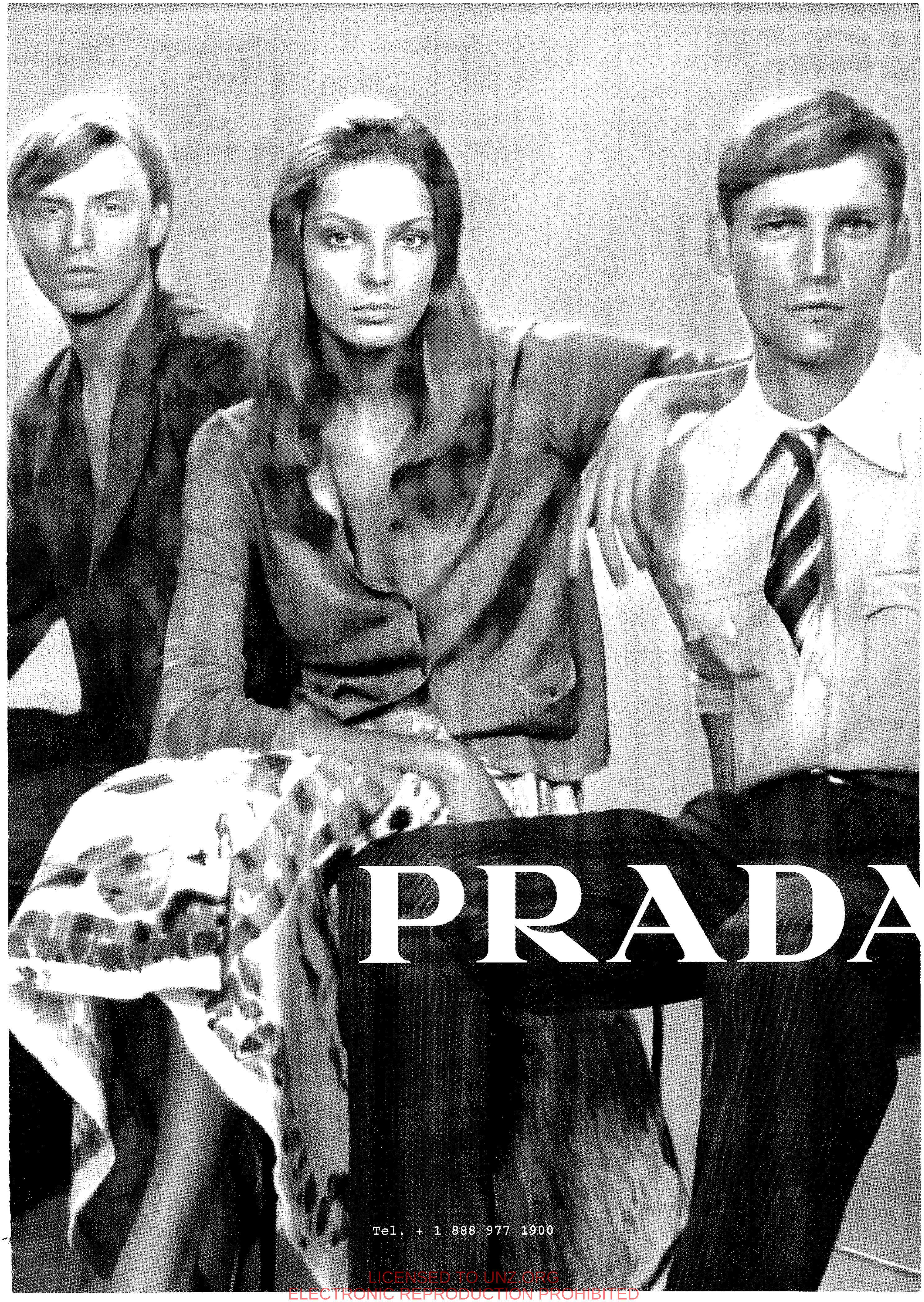
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Na zdrowie, Picasso's Cubist Period.
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Na zdrowie, Ulysses.
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Na zdrowie, Keats.
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Na zdrowie, Dad.
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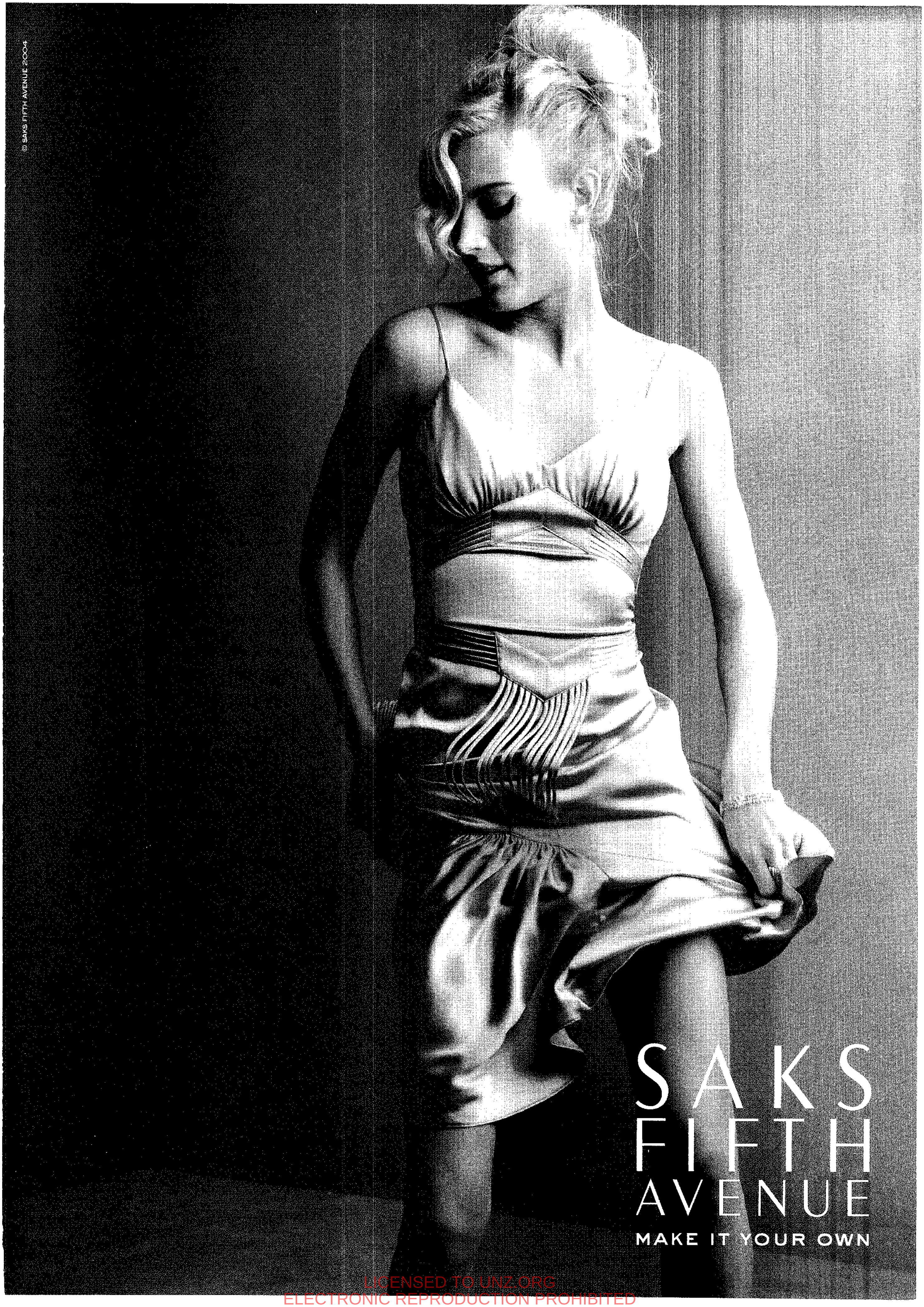
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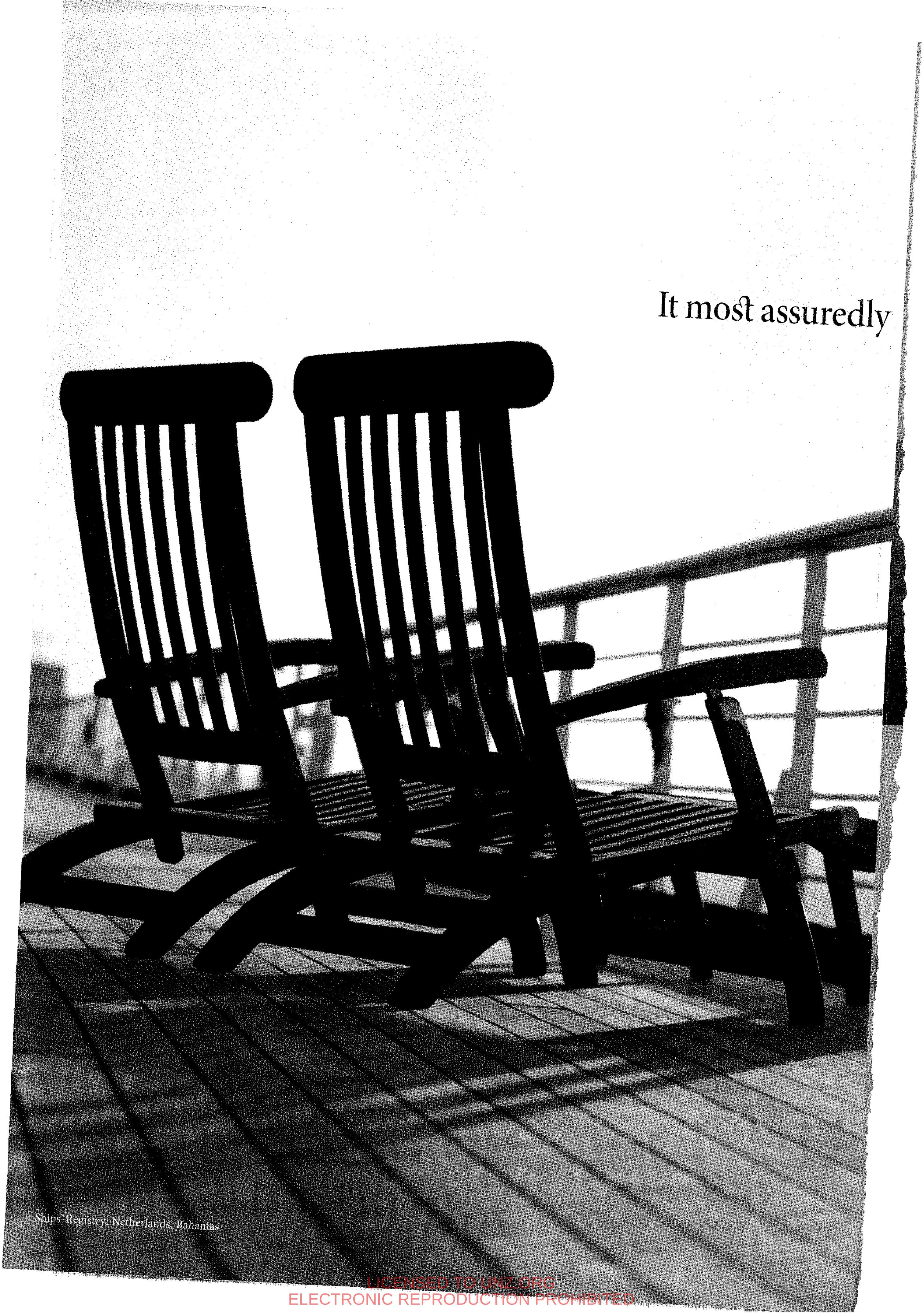
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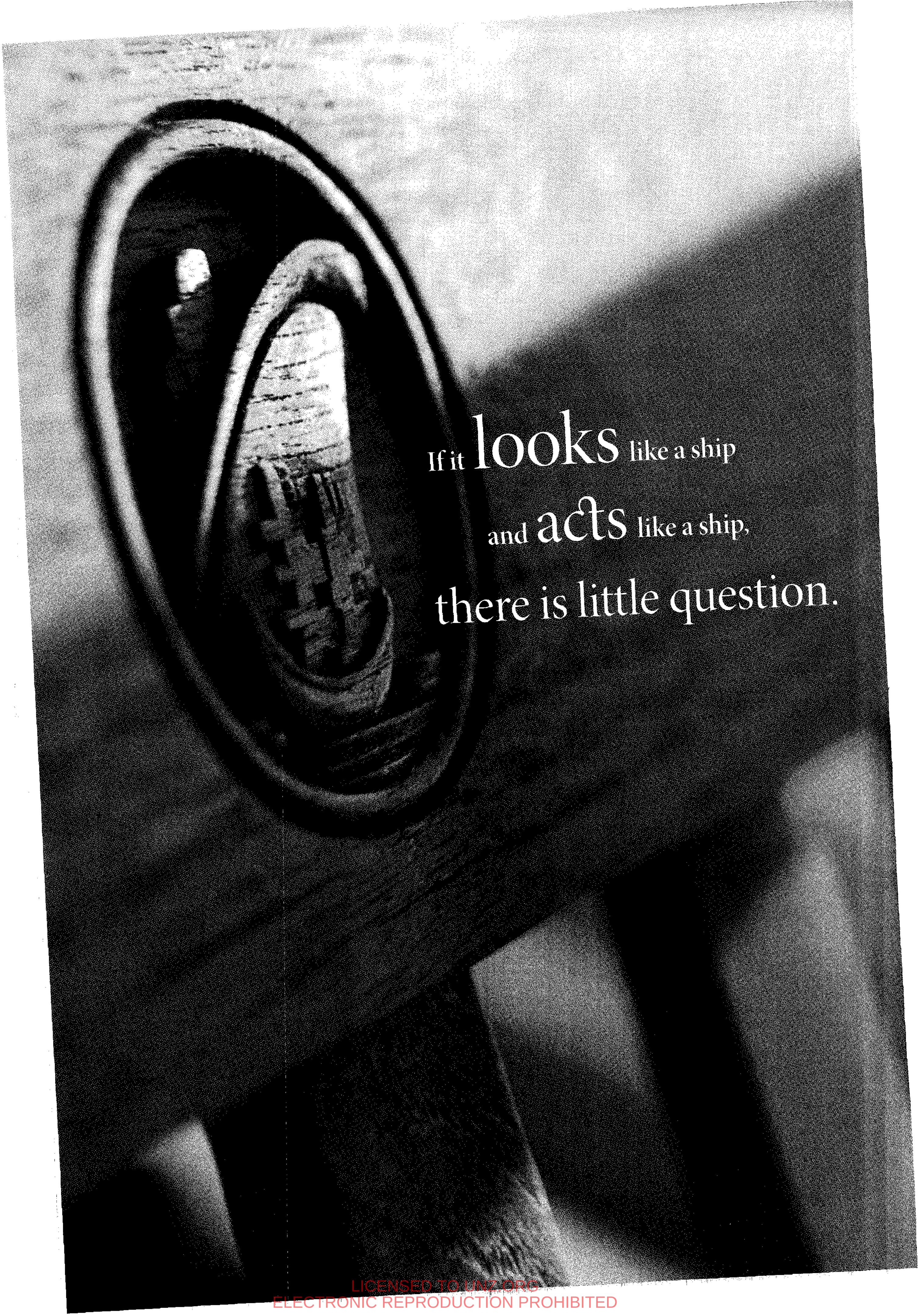

If it looks like a ship
and acts like a ship,
there is little question.

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Specter ("The Designer," p. 104) writes about science, public-health issues, and fashion for the magazine.

William Finnegan ("The Cuban Strategy," p. 70) has been a staff writer since 1987. He has published four books, including "Cold New World" and "A Complicated War."

Nick Paumgarten (The Talk of the Town, p. 66) is an editor at the magazine.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 68) writes a regular column on business and finance. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" will be published in May.

Mark Ulriksen (Cover) has a children's book, "Dog Show," with words by Elizabeth Winthrop, coming out in the fall.

Malcolm Gladwell ("The Terrazzo Jungle," p. 120) is a staff writer and the author of "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference."

Donald Antrim ("The Kimono," p. 80) is the author of the novels "Elect Mr. Robinson for a Better World," "The Hundred Brothers," and "The Verificationist."

Robert Wrigley (Poem, p. 84) has published six books of poetry, including "Lives of the Animals" and "Reign of Snakes," which won the 2000 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award.

Owen Smith (Portfolio, p. 116) has had solo exhibitions of his paintings in Los Angeles, and his work has appeared in group exhibitions in New York, Rome, and Milan. He has done fourteen covers for *The New Yorker*.

Martin Amis (Fiction, p. 128) published "Yellow Dog," a novel, in November, and "Vintage Amis," a collection of fiction and nonfiction works, in January.

Nicholas Lemann (The Wayward Press, p. 136) is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, and a staff writer.

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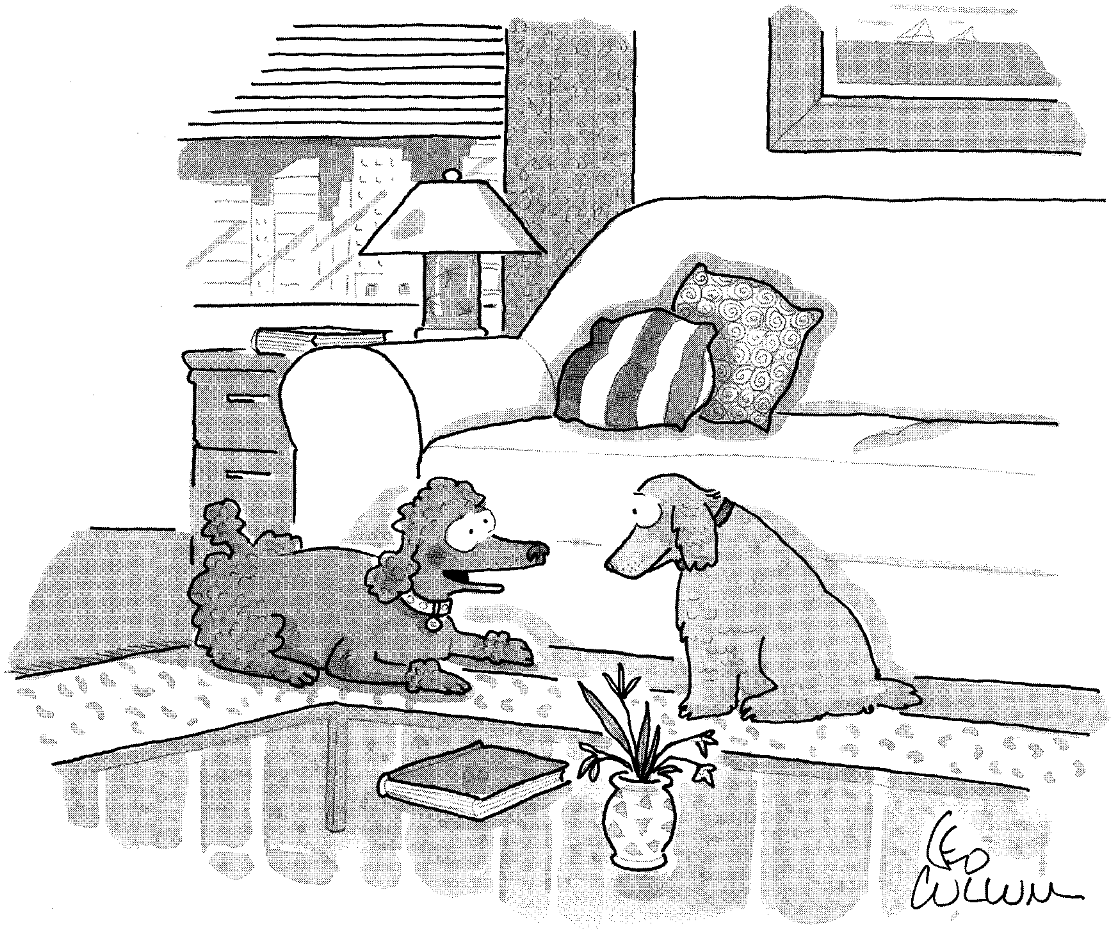
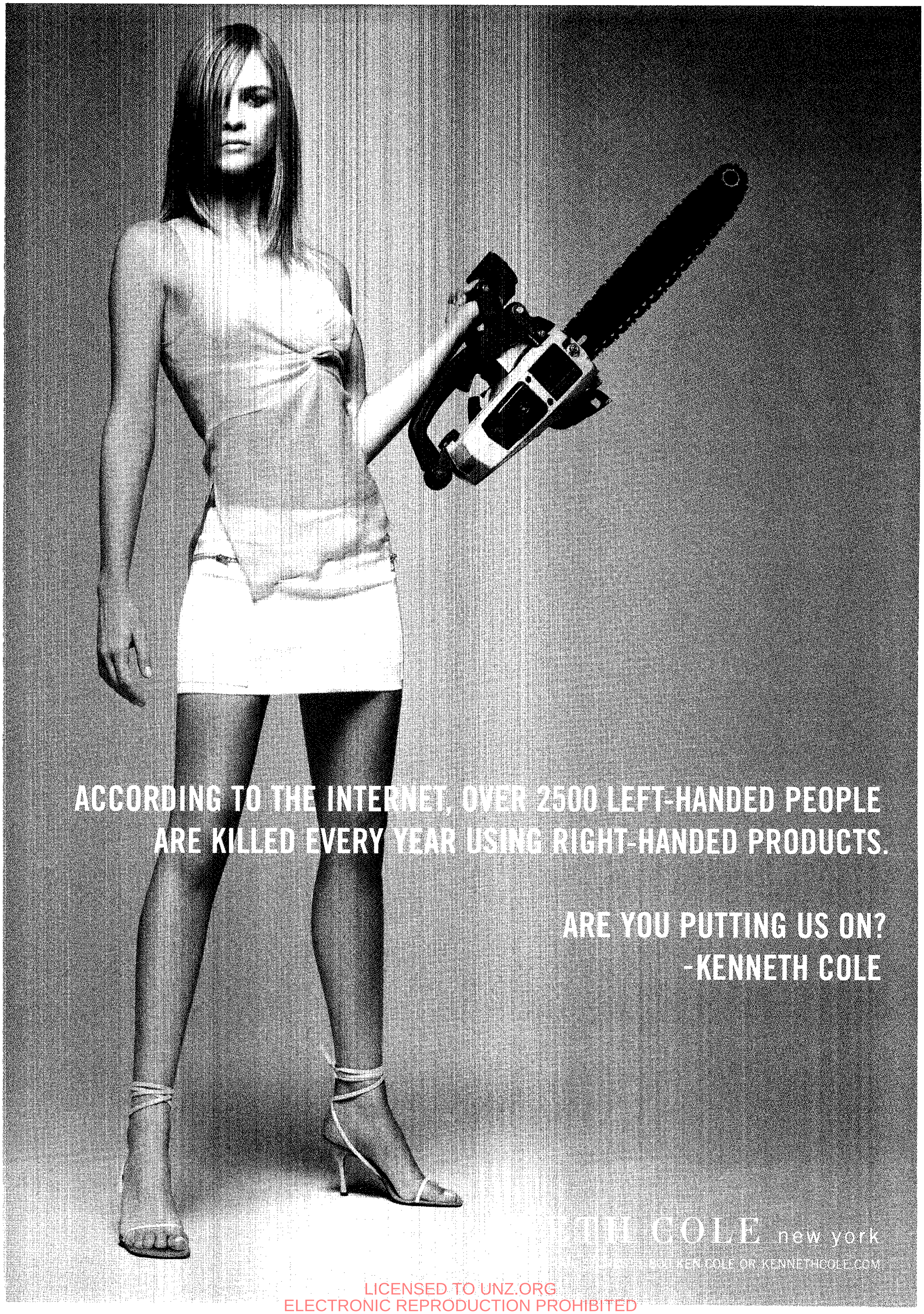
Paul Rudnick (The Back Page, p. 158) is a novelist and playwright. His new play, "Valhalla," is being performed at the New York Theatre Workshop. ♦



"Jimmy Choo, Manolo Blahnik—I honestly can't taste the difference."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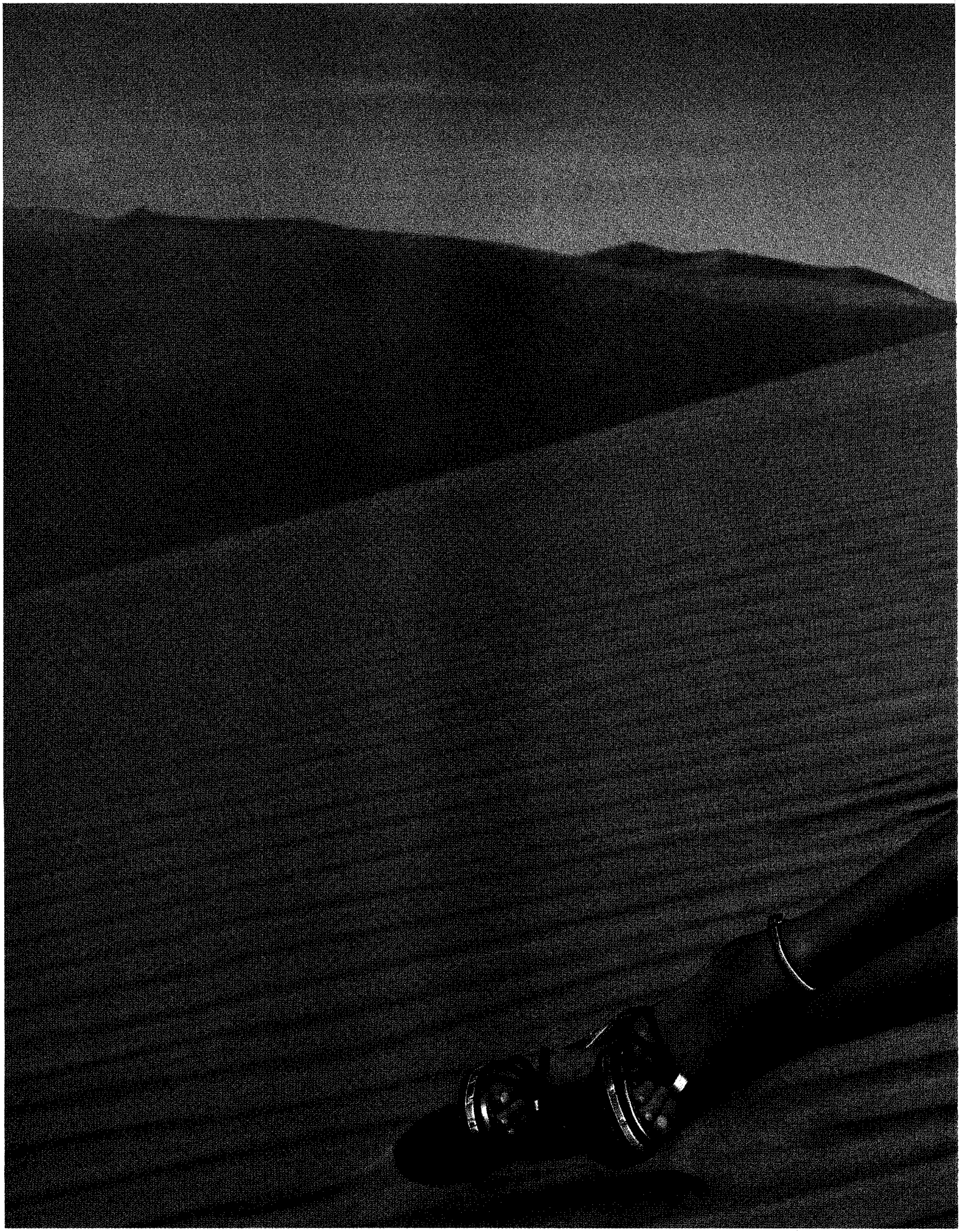

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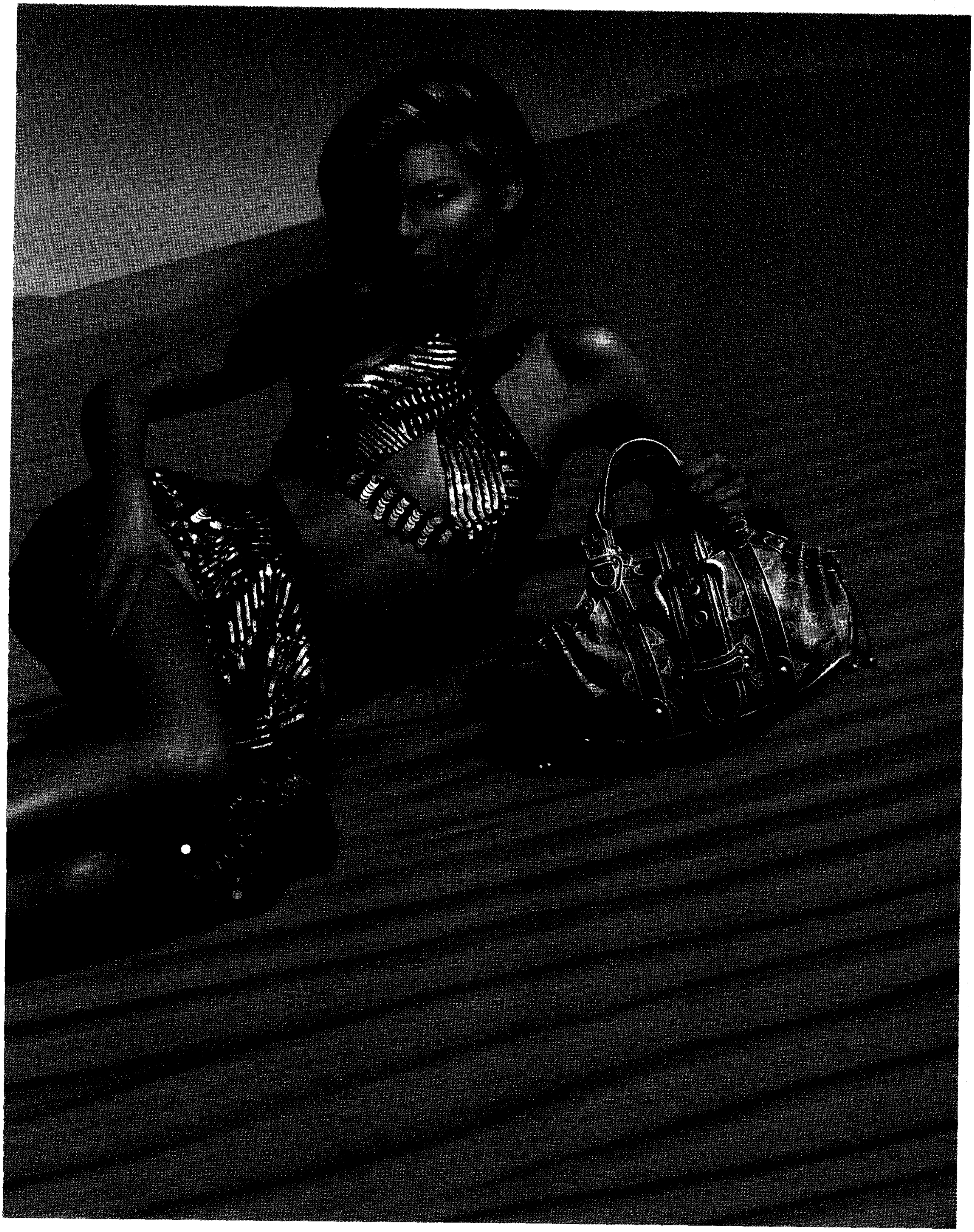

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What to Read Next

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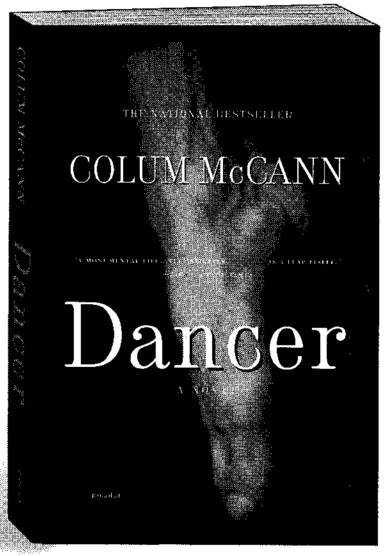
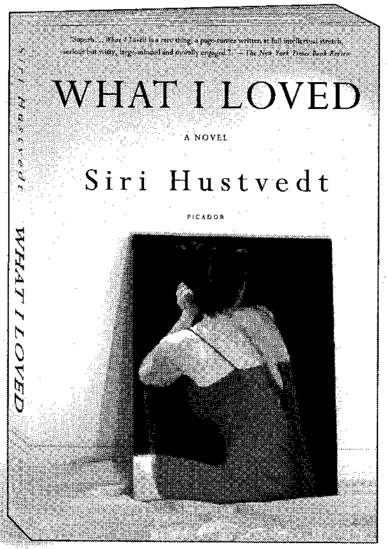
"Exuberant and exhilarating."
— *San Francisco Chronicle*

"A monumental life....
Stylistically, *Dancer* is a leap itself."
— *Los Angeles Times*





"A quietly astounding work of fiction."
— *Los Angeles Times*

"**Superb.** A page-turner written at full intellectual stretch, serious but witty, large-minded and morally engaged."
— *The New York Times Book Review*

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TIME ON THE CROSS

David Denby writes that Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is "a sickening death trip, a grimly unilluminating procession of treachery, beatings, blood, and agony" (The Current Cinema, March 1st). This is a reasonable complaint. At the same time, there is spiritual value in being submersed in the absolute horror of Jesus' physical suffering. Our modern society has become so accustomed to the idea of violence that we gloss over the utter brutality with which Jesus was treated and eventually executed. Films and television attempt to pass off injury as art. We hear death tolls on the news every day—from the war in Iraq to murders in our home towns and AIDS victims in Africa—but for most of us these are only numbers: suffering has become an abstraction, and we no longer feel, or even know how to feel, real compassion. Jesus experienced more pain in his final hours than most of us will in a lifetime. He knew what would happen; his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is the ultimate prayer of surrender. He cried for God to release him from the pain that was to come. Ultimately, Jesus willingly gave himself up to suffering and death because he knew that God would use his sacrifice for the good of the world. The Resurrection is, as Denby writes, the miracle in the story, but if we see only the Resurrection we miss much of its lesson. Because Jesus suffered, we know that God understands our suffering, and are able to fully connect with God during our darkest times. That is the spirituality in "The Passion." And, despite what Denby says, it does matter.

Sharon Baker
Indianapolis, Ind.

Denby accuses Gibson of turning Jesus' message of love into one of hate, but he fails to see the profound message of love that comes to us from the Cross. In the face of mankind's cruelty to a fellow human being, which also represents humanity's most violent rejection of God, Jesus could hang on the Cross, flayed, tortured, and beaten, and could pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Love like this provides the greatest hope one can find in this life, and a major theme of Gibson's film is that God's grace and forgiveness go deeper than the lowest depths that humanity can reach.

Mark Aalund
Pastor, Grace Fellowship of Lakewood
Lakewood, Colo.

Denby captures the critical problem with "The Passion." The way that its cinematic violence reduces the Crucifixion of Christ to something out of "Kill Bill" does an injustice to the faithful. I was raised as a Catholic, and was taught that we all had a hand in Christ's death, and that we can all be redeemed by it. Not to focus on this message is to deny the very core of Christianity—and to cut ourselves off from the hope we all need.

Lucinda Ross
New York City

Mel Gibson did not make "The Passion" to make David Denby or anyone else feel good about himself. Gibson is showing the suffering of Christ as he took the sins of the world upon himself. It is not a pretty film, it is not a perfect film, but it is a film that makes you think about who Christ is and what he did and why.

Jennifer Shaefer
Fairfield, Conn.

CORRECTIONS: In "Contract Sport," by Jane Mayer (February 16th & 23rd), the late Bill Steiger is identified as a congressman from Wyoming; his district was in Wisconsin. In a Talk of the Town story by Ben McGrath on the Yankees (March 1st), the mayor of Boston is referred to as Michael Menino. He is Thomas Menino.

•

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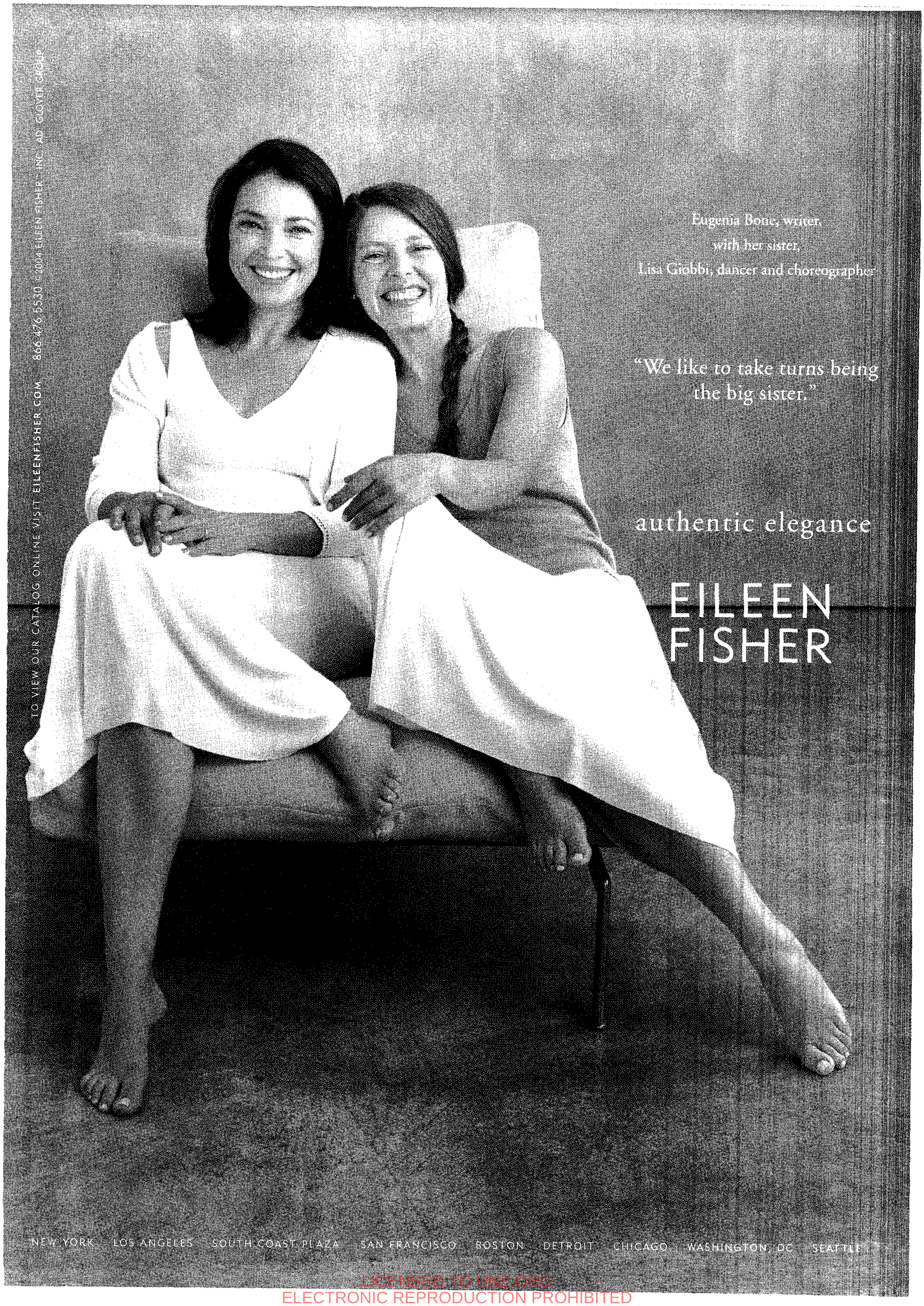
Eugenia Bone, writer,
with her sister,
Lisa Giobbi, dancer and choreographer
"We like to take turns being the big sister."
authentic elegance
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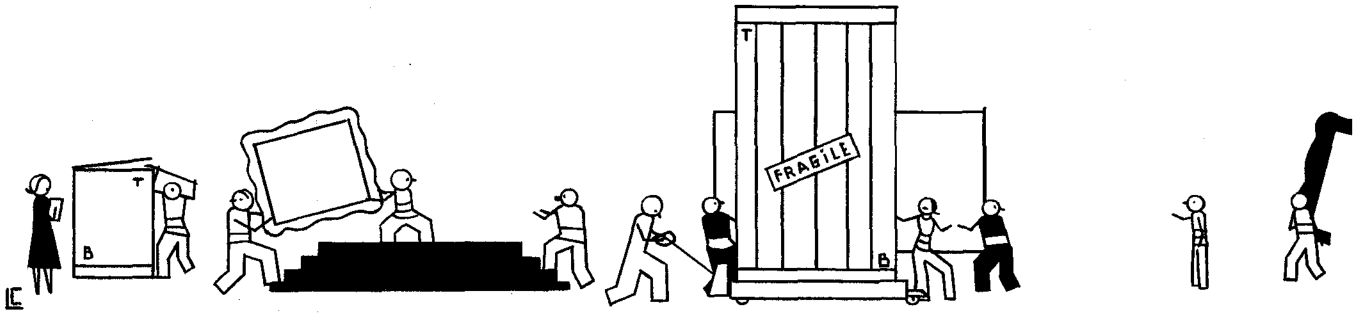

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THIS WEEK
FADE TO BLEAK

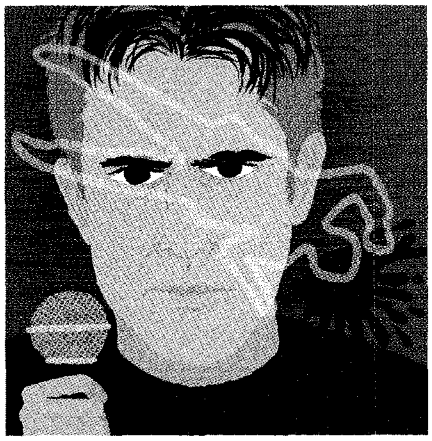
When Johnny Dowd released his first record, "The Wrong Side of Memphis," in 1997, he was almost fifty and working as a moving man in upstate New York. The album was an acquired taste. Its tales of men and women on, and often over, the edge of madness, sung in a wobbly, unhinged tenor, teetered between black comedy and Grand Guignol. A series of more assured, though no less eccentric, gothic-folk albums followed, marked by a broader musical palette and a tighter lyrical focus. The latest, "Cemetery Shoes," was released in Europe at the end of last year and is currently awaiting American distribution; Dowd, who still works as a moving man, is in town this week as the opening act for the Mekons, the venerable country-punk ensemble. (Bowery Ballroom, March 12; Maxwell's, March 13; see Night Life.)

LE CINÉMA

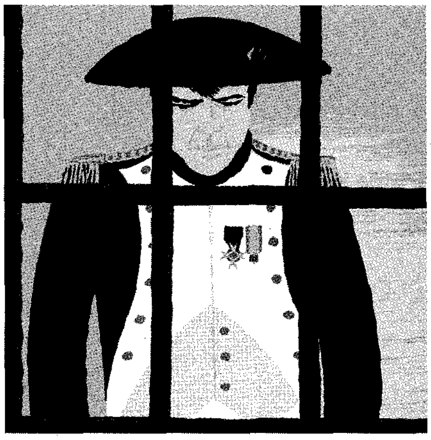
The Old Guard (Alain Resnais) and the new (Bruno Dumont) return with movies in Lincoln Center's annual French-film series. Michael Haneke, who directed "The Piano Teacher," will supply the *scandale* with "Time of the Wolf," an unsparing look at how a woman (Isabelle Huppert) survives a world-destroying catastrophe. More subdued souls might prefer "Monsieur N.," a lavishly produced costume drama that supposes Napoleon escaped his exile on St. Helena. (Starts March 12; see Movies.)

BACH, FROM OTTAWA

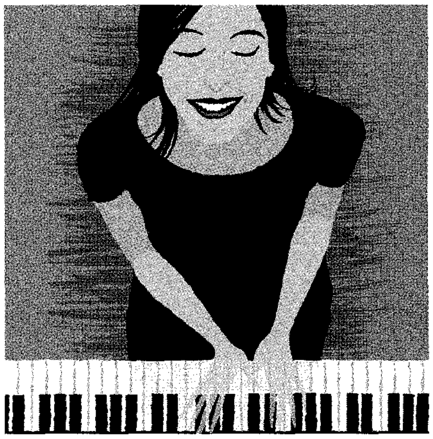
Wonderful Bach players seem to flower north of the border. The pianist Angela Hewitt is Canadian, but her playing has a tonal warmth and an unself-conscious lyricism that Glenn Gould, for all his strengths, conspicuously lacked—and she doesn't wear her intellectuality on her sleeve. Her concert this week features two of Bach's English Suites along with music by Couperin. (Miller Theatre, March 13; see Classical Music.)



The singer-songwriter Johnny Dowd appears at two venues this week.

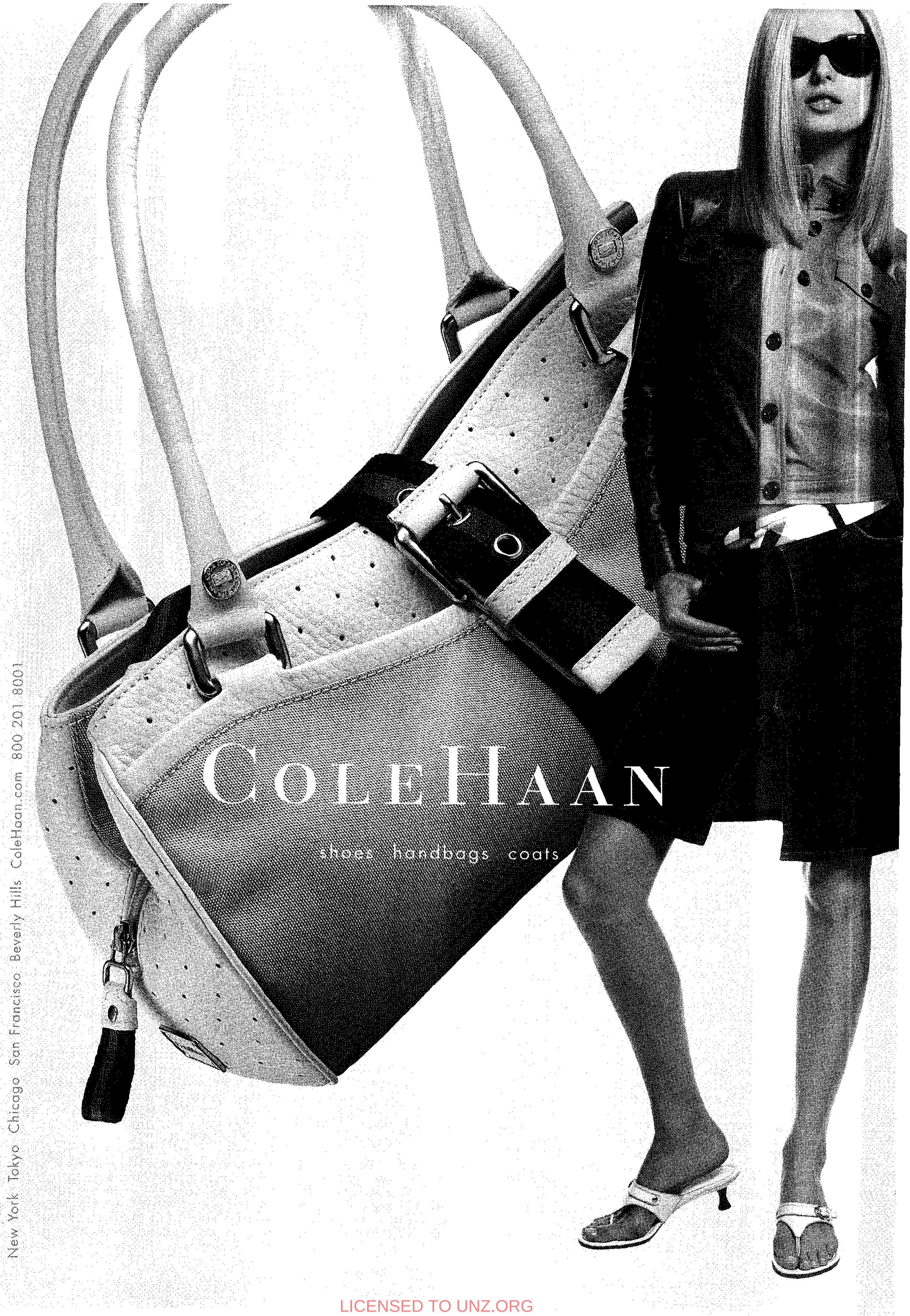


"Monsieur N.," a movie about Napoleon, at Lincoln Center's French-film festival.



The Canadian pianist Angela Hewitt comes to Miller Theatre.

JOSÉ LUIS MERINO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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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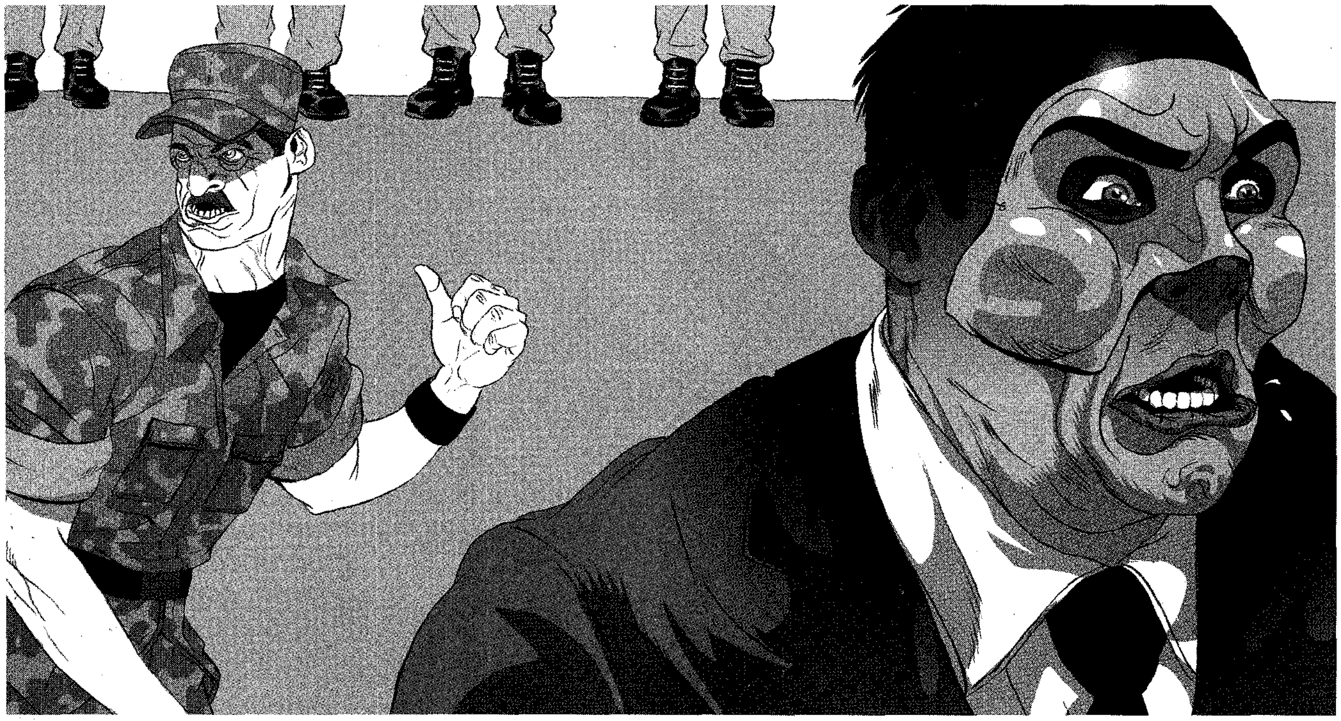
EMBEDDED
In a timely satire written and directed by Tim Robbins, media frenzy and front-line blunders attend a conflict in the Middle East. A production of the Actors' Gang. In previews. Opens March 14 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)



"Embedded," a political satire by Tim Robbins about a war in the Middle East, opens this week at the Public Theatre.

TOMER HANUKA

FROZEN
Swoosie Kurtz, Brían F. O'Byrne, and Laila Robins star in the New York première of a work by the British playwright Bryony Lavery. Directed by Doug Hughes. In previews. (East Thirteenth Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

JOHNNY GUITAR
A new musical based on Nicholas Ray's film has a book by Nicholas van Hoogstraten, music by Martin Silvestri, and additional music and lyrics by Joel Higgins, who directs. In previews. (Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE JOURNALS OF MIHAIL SEBASTIAN
Stephen Kunken stars in a play about the life and times of the Romanian novelist and playwright, adapted by David Auburn ("Proof") from the diaries that Sebastian wrote during the Second World War. A Keen Company production. Directed by Carl Forsman. In previews. (Theatre at 45th Street, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444.)

MATCH
In a new play by Stephen Belber ("Tape"), starring Frank Langella, Ray Liotta, and Melora Walters, a husband and wife interview a once famous dancer about his past. Directed by Nicholas Martin. Previews begin March 12. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The British director Edward Hall makes his New York début with the Watermill Theatre production of Shakespeare's comedy, performed by Hall's all-male company, Propellor. Opens March 16 at 7:30. Through March 28. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

MINT THEATRE COMPANY
The Mint stages two pre-Pooh plays by Alan Alexander (better known as A. A.) Milne: "The Truth About Blayds," a drama about a controlling patriarch, and "Mr. Pim Passes By," a comedy in the spirit of Wodehouse. Directed by Jonathan Bank. In previews. "Blayds" opens March 14 at 2; "Mr. Pim" opens March 14 at 7. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

OPEN HEART
Robby Benson ("Ice Castles") wrote the book, score, and lyrics for this new musical comedy about open-heart surgery, in which he also stars. He has undergone the procedure twice. Directed by Matt Williams. In previews. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PAGANS
Ann Noble's award-winning play, about an Irishman who causes trouble when he returns home to County Clare with his American wife, receives its New York début in a production by the Abingdon Theatre Company. Directed by Stephen Hollis. (June Havoc, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

SARAH, SARAH
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Daniel Goldfarb, set in Canada in 1961 and in China in 2001, about an immigrant matriarch who opposes her son's marriage. J. Smith-Cameron plays the matriarch in the first act and her granddaughter in the second. Directed by Mark Nelson. Previews begin March 11. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SILENT LAUGHTER
A slapstick farce inspired by silent movies, performed by a cast of ten and accompanied by movie-house organ music, written by Billy Van Zandt and Jane Milmore. Van Zandt also directs. In previews. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

SLY FOX
Arthur Penn directs a revival of Larry Gelbart's comedy, an update of Ben Jonson's "Volpone" that transplants the action to Gold Rush-era San Francisco. With Richard Dreyfuss, Eric Stoltz, and Elizabeth Berkley. Previews begin March 12. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SMALL TRAGEDY
In a new play by Craig Lucas ("Prelude to a Kiss"), presented by Playwrights Horizons, a small-town production of Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" is undermined by infighting and intrigue among the cast. Directed by Mark Wing-Davey. One preview on March 10. Opens March 11 at 7. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

TWENTIETH CENTURY
Alec Baldwin and Anne Heche lead the cast in the Roundabout Theatre's revival of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's comedy about a man who transforms a chorus girl into a leading lady. Directed by Walter Bobbie. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

WAVE
Will Pomerantz ("Tatjana in Color") directs the Ma-Yi Theatre Company in a new play about an Asian-American family bedevilled by a fascination with fame and firearms. Previews begin March 14. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

YEARDLEY SMITH: MORE
Smith, the actress who provides the voice of Lisa on "The Simpsons," has written an autobiographical solo play, in which she stars. Directed by Judith Ivey. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-7171.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BEAUTIFUL CHILD
Nicky Silver's first new play in four years centers on a thirty-something art teacher who has painfully puerile ideas about love. After a compromising entanglement with a very young student, he begs his complicated Wasp parents—his lecherous father (the stately George Grizzard) and his acid-tongued mother (Penny Fuller)—to take him in. The script is clever, with a dark finish. Directed by Terry Kinney. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Closes March 28.)

BIG BILL
A. R. Gurney's new play tracks the rise and fall of Bill Tilden, the tennis superstar who won seven U.S. championships in the nineteen-twenties. John Michael Higgins plays Tilden. Directed by Mark Lamos. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

BRIDGE & TUNNEL
Sarah Jones, a sort of multicultural mynah bird, lays our mongrel nation before us with gorgeous, pitch-perfect impersonations. The conceit of her eloquent one-woman show is that we are in a café where an evening of poetry is being presented by a punning Pakistani called Mohammed Ali. Each participant called to the mike is of a different background—Dominican, Chinese, Jewish, Russian,

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Vietnamese, Jamaican, Mexican, Jordanian. Their stories shed refracted light on the struggle to be an American and to make society deliver its promise, but no matter how brilliantly Jones inhabits her characters, she is narrating rather than dramatizing their essence. To lay substantial claim on the imagination, they need something larger than the repetitive revue format. Still, the production is an excellent showcase for Jones's fierce intelligence. She throws off a lot of light, which is what stars—even small ones—do. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/8/04.) (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

BUG
A new dark comedy by Tracy Letts ("Killer Joe") rests on the gimmick of a sci-fi conspiracy theory. A consortium of higher-ups have planted microbes under everyone's skin. Peter, a self-mutilating paranoid schizophrenic (played by Michael Shannon), meets Agnes (Shannon Cochran), the loneliest woman in Oklahoma, and turns her fleabag motel room into an entomology lab. In the name of love, she joins his campaign for the extermination of the ubiquitous parasites. Dexter Bullard directs. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St., at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.)

COOKIN'
Four Korean cooks scramble to create a seven-course wedding banquet in one hour in a slapstick, "Iron Chef"-gone-haywire comedy from Seoul. Conceived and directed by Seung Whan Song. (Minetta Lane, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-420-8000.)

DOUBLE INFIDELITY
Rachel Botchan gives a vigorous performance as Sylvia, a country girl who is courted by a prince, in the Pearl's production of Marivaux's eighteenth-century comedy of love and class. Sylvia rails against aristocratic pretenses but falls prey herself to vanity and pride. As the play progresses, Botchan's center of gravity seems to shift from somewhere around her knees up to her shoulders. Sean McNall steals a couple of scenes as a mannered lord who has the insinuating growl of a feral cat with a French accent. Directed by Beatrice Terry. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

DROWNING CROW
Regina Taylor's adaptation of Chekhov's "The Seagull," notionally reset in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, is a bewildering, inert mess. Directed by Marion McClinton. (3/1/04) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
In this elegant revival, the star (Alfred Molina), the director (David Leveaux), the costume designer (Vicki Mortimer), and the set designer (Tom Pye), are English; they bring to the production a certain cultural detachment, which imposes a powerful lucidity on the story and allows its moral debate to gather proper poetic momentum. The production's panache reverses the English joke "Look British, think Yiddish"; in this "Fiddler," it's indubitably a case of "Think British, look Yiddish." Every well-sculpted second has within it a sense of both regret and release, which makes the comic and tragic elements of the story at once nostalgic, evergreen, and adult. (3/8/04) (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST REVISITED
The playwright Adrian Hall has reworked his 1985 play about the convicted killer Jack Henry Abbott (whose correspondence with Norman Mailer made him a star of the Manhattan literary scene for a time, until he murdered again) in the wake of Abbott's suicide, in February of 2002. Leo Farley directs. (29th Street Repertory, 212 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

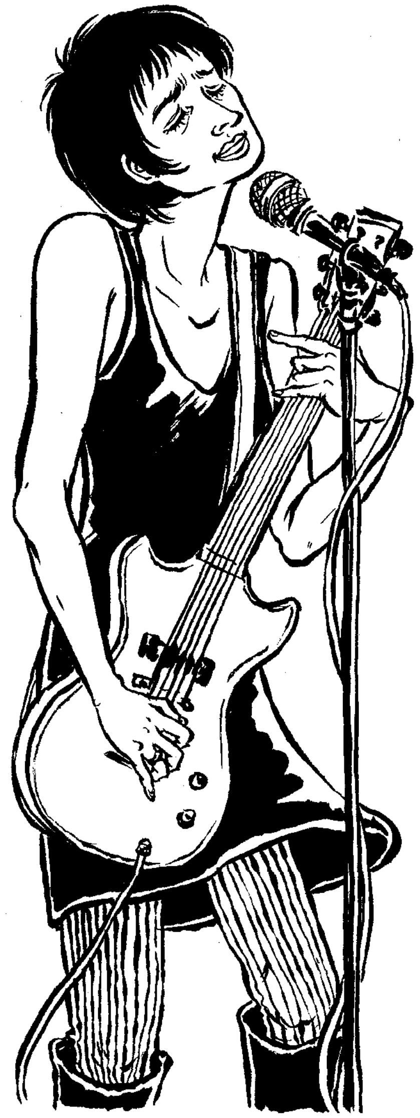
KING LEAR
Christopher Plummer is Lear in a Lincoln Center Theatre production, directed by Jonathan Miller. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont. 212-239-6200.)

THE MOONLIGHT ROOM
Tristine Skyler's critically lauded play, about two teen-agers at a hospital who are waiting for news about a friend who has overdosed, has reopened on Theatre Row. Directed by Jeff Cohen. (Beckett, 242 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

POOR THEATER
The Wooster Group performs a work in progress. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.)

THE PRODUCERS
Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane are back at the helm of this musical revisitation of the Mel Brooks film through April 4. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROULETTE
A shrewdly written drama of familial dysfunction by the Hollywood screenwriter Paul Weitz. In the play's most compelling moment, the paterfamilias (Larry Bryggman) starts his day with a game of Russian roulette at the breakfast table. Then he goes to work. The disconnected characters revolve around one another like planets whose orbits never intersect. But in Weitz's sendup of suburbia, even suicide can be fun. Directed by Trip Cullman. (3/1/04) (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)



The actress and singer Eszter Balint, at Joe's Pub (see Night Life—Clubs).

YUKO SHIMIZU

SEA OF TRANQUILITY
A new play by Howard Korder ("Boys' Life") is a kind of "La Ronde" of betrayal, although what passes between the characters is not sex but therapy. Santo Loquasto's revolving set moves from a Santa Fe living room to a counselor's office to a prison cell. The gifted cast includes Dylan Baker as an emotionally stifled counselor and Todd Weeks as his self-centered, irritating brother-in-law, an unemployed Hollywood sitcom writer who has descended upon his sister's place in New Mexico. Directed by Neil Pepe. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

SUMMIT CONFERENCE
Robert David MacDonald's play imagines a meeting between Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, and Mussolini's lover, Clara Petacchi. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME
In Terrence McNally's twin bill at Primary Stages, the playwright displays his narrative skill, his sense of fun, his love of music, and his ability to turn a threadbare trope into a surprising, complex gesture. (3/1/04) (59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THEY WROTE THAT?
For forty years, the married New York songwriters Barry Mann (the composer) and Cynthia Weil (the lyricist) have written hit after hit: "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," "On Broadway," "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," "Sometimes When We Touch," etc. In this good-natured, unpretentious show, Mann plays the piano and sings while Weil narrates the story of their career and their marriage. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

VALHALLA
Paul Rudnick's comic drama juxtaposes the lives of King Ludwig II of Bavaria (the charismatic Peter Frechette), who neglects his royal duties to indulge his passions for opera, sex, and architecture, and James Avery (Sean Dugan), a teen-ager in Texas in the nineteen-forties who would rather go to bed with his friend Henry Lee Stafford (Scott Barrow) than play football or get married. Directed by Christopher Ashley. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WILD DUCK
The Jean Cocteau Repertory presents a new translation by Rolf Fjelde of Ibsen's play about a feud between two families, directed by Eve Adamson. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.)

WINTERTIME
Charles L. Mee's latest is a zany fireside entertainment loosely patterned on "The Winter's Tale." An unconventional family, composed of a wife, her husband, her French lover, her husband's gay lover, her son, her son's would-be fiancée, and the lesbian couple next door (this is a partial list), converge on a snowbound country house. Sexual jealousy tears the group apart, until the death of the wife (Marsha Mason) teaches them to value love over pride. The director, David Schweizer, keeps the physical comedy going and going, with slamming doors, smashing plates, and bathetic opera arias. Michael Cerveris eats up the role of the preening, overwrought French lover. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

ALSO PLAYING

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AUNT DAN AND LEMON
Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes March 28.)

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

THE BOY FROM OZ
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

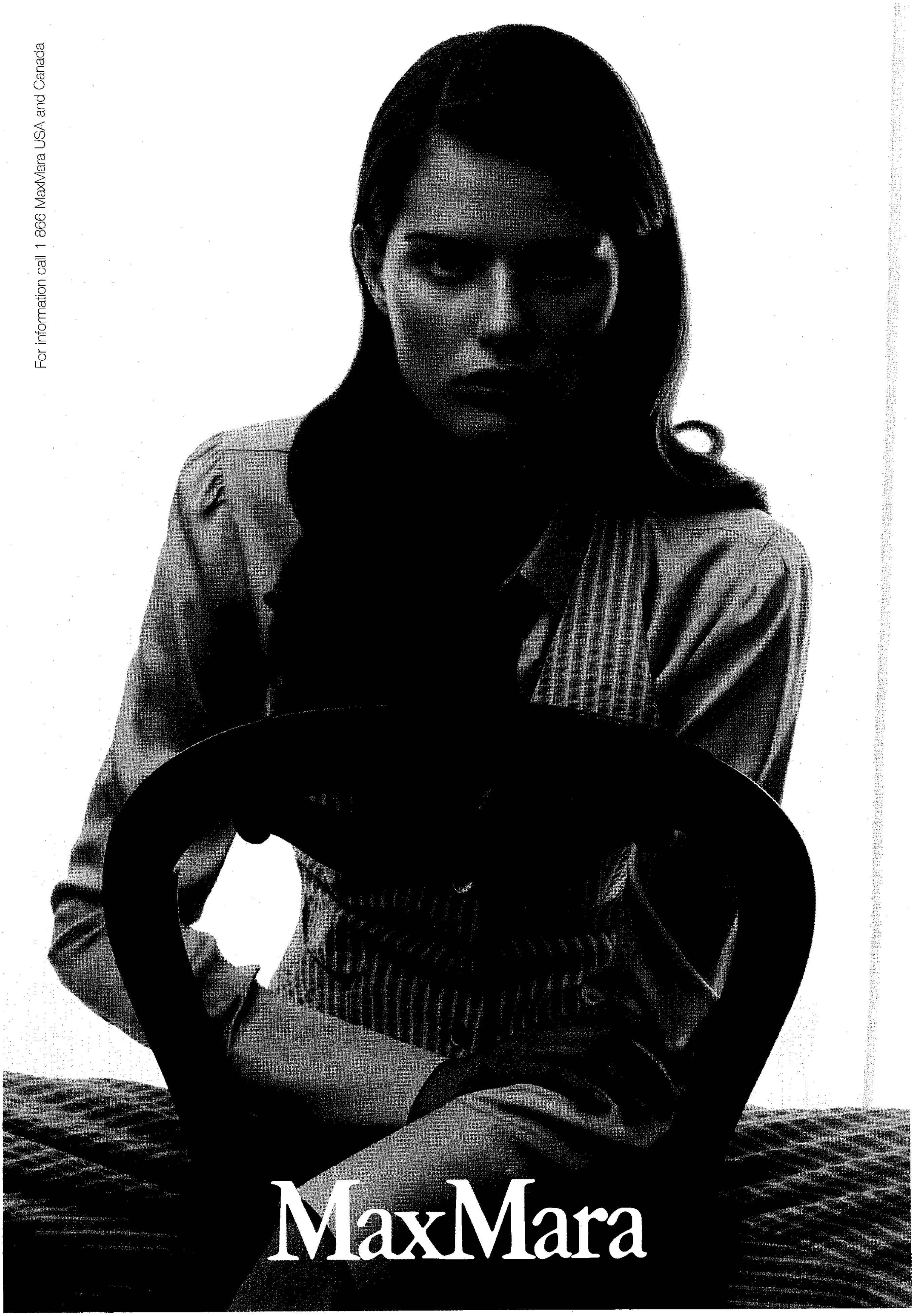
CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes March 14.)

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

DOÑA ROSITA THE SPINSTER
Bouwerie Lane, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.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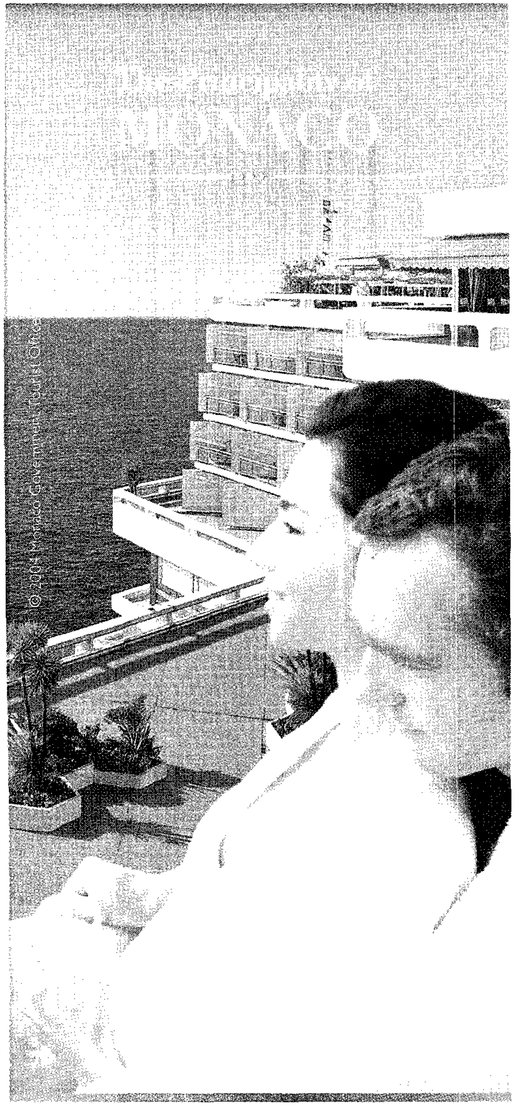

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Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.
MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.
THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.
WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.
WONDERFUL TOWN
Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

POP NOTES

COUNTRY COMFORTS

Graham Parker has, over his long career, had as many labels as a steamer trunk. He recently jumped to the Chicago-based roots label Bloodshot, which is best known for records by Neko Case, the Waco Brothers, and Ryan Adams. The result, **"Your Country,"** is being billed as the first Graham Parker country album, and, while it's true that the guitars have more twang and cry, it's fundamentally a Graham Parker record. His singing has grown slightly reedier as he has aged, and the thinness suits the material. "Anything for a Laugh," the album opener, offers up another in a long line of Parker songs with wise, self-loathing lyrics. "The Rest Is History" is an unabashedly romantic ballad ("The sound your breathing makes when you are satisfied") that skirts sappiness with its gently gritty vocal. "Cruel Lips" brings in Lucinda Williams for harmonies; "Nation of Shopkeepers" offers a touching portrait of Britain's working class. And the record has a pair of covers, a sprightly take on Jerry Garcia's "Sugaree" and a roadhouse remake of Parker's own "Crawling from the Wreckage."

Lambchop, the sprawling alt-country collective led by Kurt Wagner, has always been hard to pin down—sometimes the group sounds like a dolorous lounge act, sometimes like an ultra-ironic indie-rock band, and sometimes like a Curtis Mayfield-inflected soul outfit. Matters aren't clarified any on Lambchop's two new records, **"Aw C'mon"** and **"No You C'mon"** (Merge). Anchored by Wagner's gruff whisper, the band still drifts away on a tide of oblique confessional lyrics and knowingly baroque countrypolitan arrangements, with cloying strings from the Nashville String Machine. "Aw C'mon" is the more consistent record of the pair, with run-down laments like "Four Pounds in Two Days" (about Wagner's attempt to quit smoking) and "Women Help to Create the Kind of Men They Despise" (self-explanatory) and a number of wonderful instrumentals. "No You C'mon," by contrast, sounds like a set of outtakes, although there's something to be said for the up-tempo "Nothing Adventurous Please" and the instrumental dance number "Shang a Dang Dang."

—Ben Greenman

DANCE

NEDERLANDS DANS THEATER
This is one of the sleekest companies in Europe, thanks to Jiří Kylián, who was its director from 1978 to 1999. Anders Hellström took over in January of this year, but the company remains faithful to Kylián in its first season at BAM in a decade. Program A, on the first two nights, consists of the recent Kylián ballets "Claude Pascal," "Last Touch," and "27'52"," which combine surgically precise movements with wide-ranging existential literary allusions. On Program B, which is more eclectic, there are two Kylián pieces—"Symphony of Psalms," from 1978, with sweeping duets to Stravinsky's grand music, and the chilling "Click-Pause-Silence," from 2000, in which the abrupt movements of three men and a woman are reflected and repeated by a mirror and a spinning TV monitor. The second program also includes "Walking Mad," by Johan Inger, who makes crafty use of Ravel's "Bolero." (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4129. Program A: March 9-10 at 7:30. Program B: March 12-13 at 7:30 and March 14 at 3.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
The company concludes its season at City Center. March 10 and March 12 at 8 and March 14 at 2: "Runes," "Le Grand Puppetier," and "Mercuric Tidings." ♦ March 11 and March 13 at 8 and March 14 at 6:30: "Sunset," "Dreamgirls," and "Promethean Fire." ♦ March 13 at 2: "Airs," "In the Beginning," and "Piazzola Caldera." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

BODYVOX
The Joyce début of this Portland-based company, created by Jamey Hampton (an alumnus of Pilobolus) and Ashley Roland (from MOMIX), includes the tender, surprising film "Deere John," in which Hampton, wearing a suit without a jacket, tentatively approaches a giant hydraulic shovel on a green lawn and conducts a slow duet, with the machine, in perfect sympathy and synchrony with the stately sounds of Saint-Saëns's "Le Cygne." The film is a good demonstration of the company's philosophy: set the work to enjoyable music, keep it technically skillful, and keep it witty and short. The season includes one other film, Mitchell Rose's "Case Studies from the Groat Center for Sleep Disorders," and eleven dances, including "Reverie," a sextet choreographed by Hampton and Roland to Delibes's "Flower Duet," from "Lakmé," with exquisite hand-painted costumes by Michael Curry. "Twins," a jokey piece by Roland set to Verdi, is performed by Roland and Eric Skinner, dressed as Euro urchins in striped short sets and black caps. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 9-12 at 8, March 13 at 2 and 8, and March 14 at 2 and 7:30.)

PETER BOAL & COMPANY
A new company by the regal, thoughtful New York City Ballet principal Peter Boal has its début season at the Joyce, presenting work that explores several dance vocabularies and shows off the versatility of skilled dancers. Joining Boal from City Ballet are Wendy Whelan, whose angular physicality lends edginess to an excerpt from William Forsythe's playful "Herman Schmerman," and the up-and-coming Carla Körbes and Sean Suozzi. The program includes Twyla Tharp's witty solo "Pergolesi," originally created for Mikhail Baryshnikov, and world premières by John Alleyne and Martin Goecke. A rare opportunity to see ballet stars pushing their boundaries in an intimate setting. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 16 at 8. Through March 21.)

JOHANNES WIELAND
The cerebral, sinuous German choreographer Johannes Wieland came to New York University for his M.F.A. three years ago and never left. He formed a company, which is presenting two fast-moving new dances as part of the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Project. In the first, "Membrane," eight men and women in black windbreakers and pants slip in and out of each other's coat sleeves, hurl themselves from the floor into one another's arms, or drop to the ground and slide away. The second work, "Filtrate," brings together two children, three dancers in their prime, and two dancers

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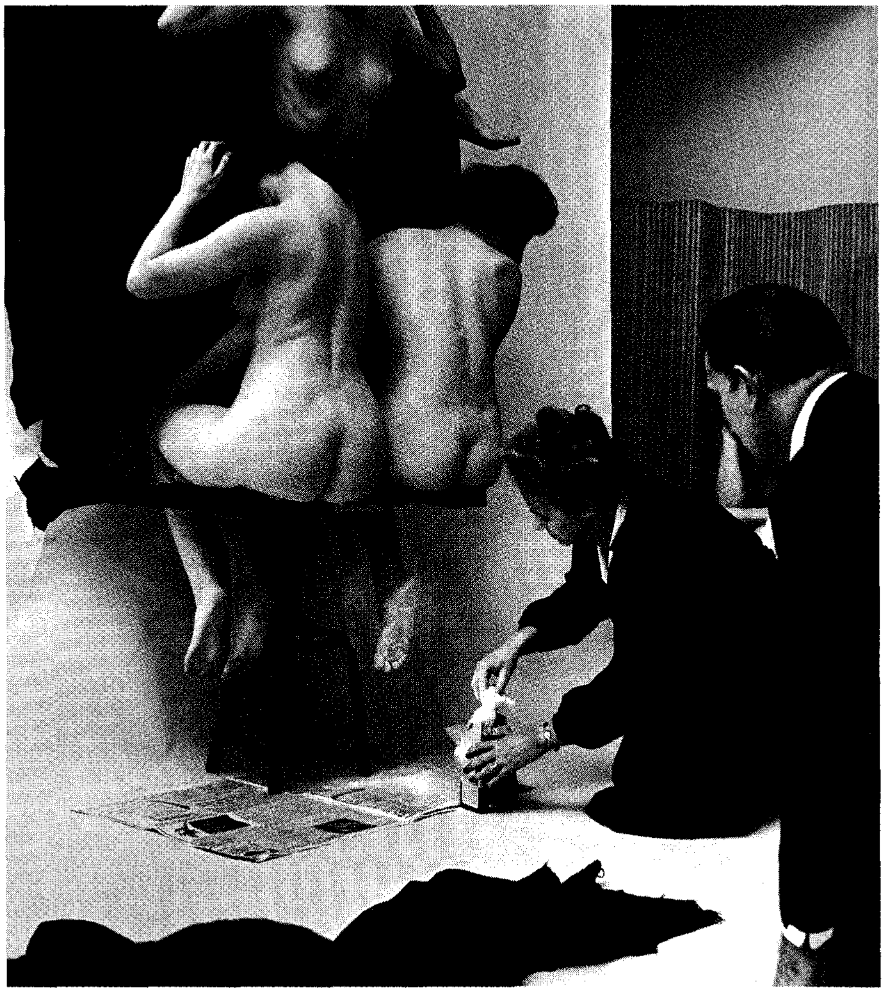

"The Making of Dali's 'In Voluptate Mors,' 1951," from a group of photographs of the artist by Philippe Halsman currently on show at the Howard Greenberg Gallery.

in their fifties. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. March 10-11 at 8, March 13 at 8, and March 14 at 2 and 7.)

THE KITCHEN
Jonathan Burrows, the British choreographer and former Royal Ballet dancer, and his frequent collaborator, the composer Matteo Fargion, present "Both Sitting Duet," a highly structured dance that does not involve the feet. Seated in chairs, side by side, the two men perform a mesmerizingly quick and intricate series of hand and upper-body movements for fifty minutes, accompanied by nothing but the creaking of their chairs, the sound of their hands brushing, and the rustling of a page of the score that lies on the floor. The Kitchen's "Works in Process" series, upstairs, is putting on a multimedia rock operetta with a large cast, choreographed by Anika Kristensen, a Dane who has been influenced by Japanese dance, and Michael Portnoy. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. March 11-13 at 8.)

DANSPACE PROJECT
The "City/Dans" series continues with "I Wanted to Say . . . But I Said . . . ," a high-velocity piece by Amanda Loulaki and her Short Mean Lady company. The dancers thrash about and fidget compulsively, portraying the neuroses bred by the overstimulation of big-city life (in one scene, a woman half-resists, half-encourages the advances of an imaginary partner, ignoring a real man onstage). Also at Danspace, the "DraftWork" series features a work in progress by Polly Motley, based on the Fibonacci sequence (numbers that replicate certain growth patterns found in nature). (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Loulaki: March 11-14 at 8:30. Motley: March 13 at 3.)

DANCE THEATRE WORKSHOP
Andrea E. Woods presents "At the Soul Level," an evening of dances celebrating the spirit, many of them set to music by Randy Weston and Philip Hamilton. Her program, part of D.T.W.'s "Carnival" series, shares the week with Karl Anderson and Kate Weare's "A Picture and a Thousand Words." (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. "At the Soul Level": March 10-11 at 7. "A Picture and a Thousand Words": March 12-13 at 7. Through March 20.)

DIXON PLACE: "BODY BLEND"
The series, curated by Sara Juli, is devoted to choreographers who work with artists in other media. Dance-makers in this month's program include Ara Fitzgerald, Susan Hefner & Dancers, the Kinesis Project, and Summer and Company. (University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St., at Rivington St. For more information, call 212-219-0736. March 15 at 8.)

[CG]4X
Four solos on quasi- or pseudo-scientific themes are presented in an evening of dance at the Old American Can Factory complex. Karinne Keithley's "Now I'll Tell You Something About Salt" explores the survival concerns of an endangered fish, Nora Stephens's "Minimum Speed of an Explosion" investigates violent releases of energy, Rebecca Davis's "Migration to the Edge of Supersaturation" uses an inflatable costume and the sound of breathing to explore the gas-decompression malady known as the bends, and Ursula Eagly's "Superheavy Western" employs the periodic table of the elements as a visual aid for a lecture (with movement) on the element ununnunium. (230 3rd St., at Third Ave., Gowanus, Brooklyn. 718-237-4335. March 12-13 at 7:30 and 9:30.)

YI MAE BANG
The Korean dance master visits the United States for the first time in more than a decade, performing the Buddhist shaman dance the *salp'uri* and the *sungmu* ("monk dance") as part of the "Global Beat of the Boroughs" series. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 14 at 5.)

COLD COMFORT
In the late stages of hypothermia, people start shedding clothes as if they were boiling alive. That isn't the strangest thing that happens in the unrelievedly white Antarctica of Karen Sherman's new dance-theatre piece. As Sherman's character's delirium worsens, she does indeed strip, but she also indulges in fantasy games with a penguin doll while other dancers play penguins, waddling about stiff-armed, or pretend they are glaciers involved in a game of Twister. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. March 11-13 at 7:30 and March 14 at 5.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

DAVE HOLLAND BIG BAND
Slowly but steadily, Holland has evolved from fronting first-rate small ensembles to flawlessly leading big bands. His plush compositions and orchestrations are brought to life by eager young players itching to learn at the hand of a modern master. And his bass playing is still astonishing. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 10 at 8:30.)

CYNDI LAUPER
Lauper, who arrived on the scene fully formed with "She's So Unusual" in the early eighties, has never been able to shake the public's perception of her as a nutty neon-haired siren. Her tireless attempts to showcase her serious side, not to mention her underrated vocal chops, have brought only modest success, not because she's not capable of emotional depth, but because she has never assembled a collection of songs as strong as those on her début. Her latest album, "At Last," finds her trying her hand at the standards of Burt Bacharach, Smokey Robinson, and Etta James. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. March 11 at 8.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
The **Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra**—Jazz at Lincoln Center's other large ensemble—couldn't have coalesced at a better moment. With Latin jazz experiencing a renaissance, this focussed outfit, led by **Arturo O'Farrill**, the pianist son of the monumental arranger Chico O'Farrill, reanimates the work of pioneers like Dizzy Gillespie, Mario Bauza, and Chico O'Farrill. The saxophonist **Paquito D'Rivera** joins in here. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 11 and March 13 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
March 12 at 8: "Fiesta Mexican" is a night of mariachi, jarocho, conjunto, and marimba music with **Mariachi los Camperos de Nati Cano, José Gutiérrez** and **Los Hermanos Ochoa, Mingo Saldívar's Los Cuatro Espadas,** and **Marimba Chiapas.** (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) March 13 at 8: A pre-St. Patrick's Day celebration with **Altan.** (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) (For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

THE JAMMYS
This awards show, now in its fourth year, celebrates jam bands, which play music not noted for its formal structure—long, improvisational, loosely organized tunes inspired by the Grateful Dead. The list of performers, like the music itself, goes on forever: Dickey Betts, Randall Bramblett, Oteil Burbridge, the Disco Biscuits, Flavor Flav, Reid Genauer and the Assembly of Dust, Gov't Mule, JoJo Hermann, Toots Hibbert (of Toots and the Maytals), Dr. John, George Porter, Chris Robinson, Slick Rick, Soulive, Brian Stoltz, String Cheese Incident, Reggie Watts (of Maktub), Steve Winwood, and Victor Wooten are all scheduled to appear. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. March 16 at 8.)

CLUBS

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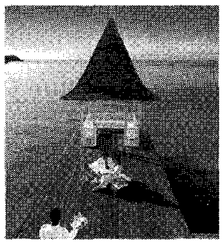

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Groove Theory and has got down and dirty with the Philadelphia rap conglomerate the Roots. On her own, she's suffered major-label troubles, but that hasn't stopped her from releasing a new album of swirling neo-soul, "Bravebird." March 13: **John Mayall** and the **Bluesbreakers.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 12: The **Mekons** never made as big a splash as some of their fellow late-seventies punk rockers, but they have been fawned over by rock critics, and they have a fiercely loyal fan base. The humble ensemble from Leeds, England, has developed its sound from an amateurish caterwaul into a versatile arsenal of styles, encompassing rock, country, and avant-garde noise. Their latest album, "Punk Rock," finds the band revisiting material from their earliest incarnation. With **Johnny Dowd** (see This Week). March 13: **British Sea Power,** an accomplished and eccentric quartet from Cumbria, England, has garnered rapturous press, in part for its visual aesthetic (the band dresses in military gear and is often flanked by stuffed birds), but the intense music, spiritually and sonically akin to Joy Division, makes it a band to root for. March 15: The **Get Up Kids** came together some eight years ago in the basements and back yards of Kansas City and quickly became stars of emo-punk, which is located somewhere between punk and pop. Their albums, including the new one, "Guilt Show," have become cleaner and tighter over the years, but onstage they still display a respectable gutter-punk attitude.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—The smart and sexy burlesque show the **Va Va Voom Room** is back after a winter hiatus. Miss Astrid, an eye-patch-wearing, cigarette-smoking, lost love child of Marlene Dietrich, presides. The acts on March 13 include the red-headed male dancer Tigger, the theremin player Armen Ra, the hula-hoop dancer Miss Saturn, the magicians and ventriloquists Cardone & Cadabra, and the singers Lex Grey and Diamond Redd. March 16 and Tuesdays this month: The **Howard Fishman Quartet.** Led by the guitarist and gravelly-voiced singer Fishman, a Connecticut native who spent his musically formative years in New Orleans, the band spins out an eclectic mix of small-group swing, early American folk, and even indie rock. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 10: The **Mavericks,** one of the few country bands with a fervent rock-and-roll following. March 11: Two gifted vocal improvisers appear on the same bill. **Rahzel,** a hip-hop m.c. and Roots associate, is known far and wide for his human-beatbox abilities. He can effortlessly replicate all kinds of musical sounds. **Mike Patton** is the former front man of Faith No More and Mr. Bungle and one of the busiest presences in alternative rock music, with connections to bands like Fantomas and Tomahawk and his own label, Ipecac. He's also one of the strangest vocalists around, a disarmingly elastic performer who can croon like a seventies soul man or conjure a demonic screech from the bowels of hell. March 16: In the tradition of the Saints, Radio Birdman, and other American-influenced Australian garage punks, a new generation of sweaty antipodeans arrives on the "Aussie Invasion" tour. Leading the charge are the instrument-trashing **Vines.** Count on **Jet** to supply a louche vibe as it recalls an era when the Rolling Stones were still cool and dangerous. With the **Living End** and **Neon.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 14: The seductive Hungarian-born chanteuse and actress **Eszter Balint** has just released "Mud," a new collection of alt-countryish songs. Her darkly ironic tunes are laced with supple fiddle playing that occasionally has an Eastern European sound. Here, she'll be backed by a cadre of talented musicians, including the high-energy guitar maven Chris Maxwell and the bassist and banjo player Michael DuClos. Later on March 14, and Sundays this month, the singer-songwriter **Dan Bern** holds court.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 13: The **Loser's Lounge** pays tribute to Van Morrison.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—March 13: The **Mekons** (see the Bowery Ballroom) unplug for an acoustic show. With **Johnny Dowd** (see This Week).

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 12: The young crooner and pianist **Julian Velard** has a band that includes a trumpeter, a violinist, and an acoustic bassist. But Velard's carefully crafted music falls squarely in the pop category. His repertoire includes an unnerving interpretation of "The Way You Make Me Feel" that hints at what the song might have been if Michael Jackson were an unsung barroom musician in New Orleans. March 13: The **Youngblood Brass Band,** a nine-piece outfit from Madison, Wisconsin, is the heartland's answer to the Roots: a horn-driven hip-hop ensemble. Also performing is **Pete Miser,** a Portland, Oregon, native, who as a young man reached for the turntables instead of an acoustic guitar. He moved to New York City in the late nineties and was chosen to d.j. on the British songbird Dido's tour. His latest solo release, "Radio Free Brooklyn," is squeaky clean (one track, "Toothbrush," is built around the sound of bristles on enamel).

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—March 11: Successfully conjuring the ghosts of Bon Scott, Molly Hatchet, and the MC5, the members of **Bad Wizard** re-create the rock of the seventies.

RODEO BAR
375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (212-683-6500)—March 12: **Commander Cody** and his band warm up the hot-rod Lincoln.

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—March 11: Bands Against Bush gives voter apathy a swift kick in the rear with **Kilowatthours, Cholo, Shellshocked,** and **Emma La Reina.** March 12: The Philadelphia roots-rock band **Marah** received a boost two years ago when Bruce Springsteen contributed a guitar solo and some vocals to their album "Float Away with the Friday Night Gods." Also performing is **Cary Hudson,** formerly of the alternative-country band Blue Mountain, and **Andy Friedman,** an artist and storyteller who's elevated the interstitial ramblings of a wayward folk musician into an art form. March 13: **Steve Wynn,** a celebrated veteran of the neo-psychedelic paisley-underground scene.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—March 11: The dub specialist and frequent Lee (Scratch) Perry collaborator **Mad Professor.** With **Trumystic** and **Dub Is a Weapon.**

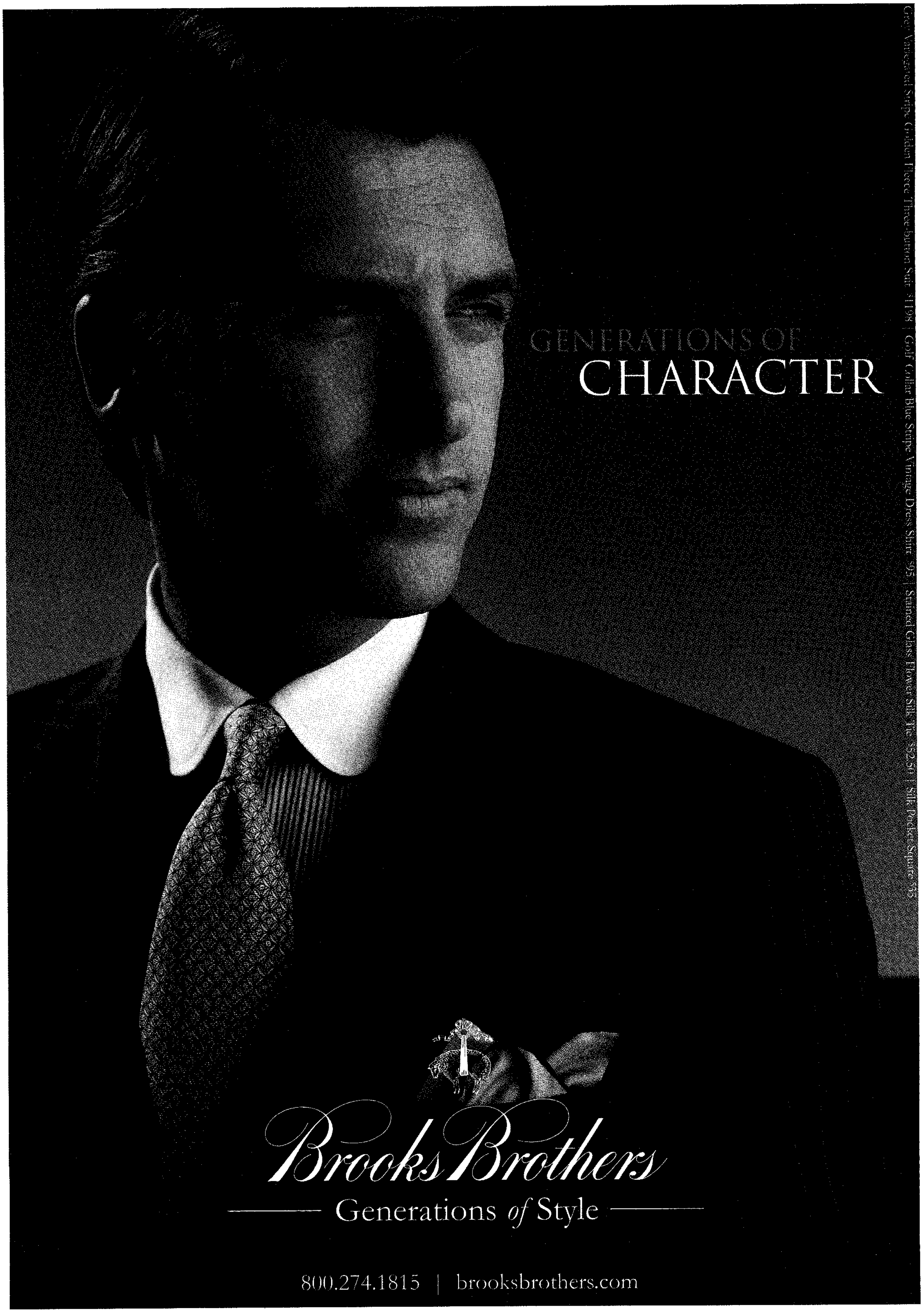
TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—March 13: The eclectic guitarist **Marc Ribot** jams with his trio. At midnight: **Forro in the Dark.** Led by the percussionist Mauro Refosco, this local ensemble celebrates the music of Luiz Gonzaga, a cowboy accordionist who popularized *forró,* blue-collar party music from Brazil's northeastern interior.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through March 13: **Tierney Sutton.** Any contemporary singer who evokes Frank Sinatra is courting danger, but on Sutton's new album, "Dancing in the Dark," she finds her own way into the Chairman of the Board's material.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through March 14: The lite-tropical jazz of **Gato Barbieri's** albums of the past few decades may not appeal to those enamored of the slashing free-jazz improvisations of his earlier Argentine fusion work, but the tenor saxophonist's suave and sensuous tone provides its own rewards.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through March 27, the big, unabashed voice of **Betty Buckley.**



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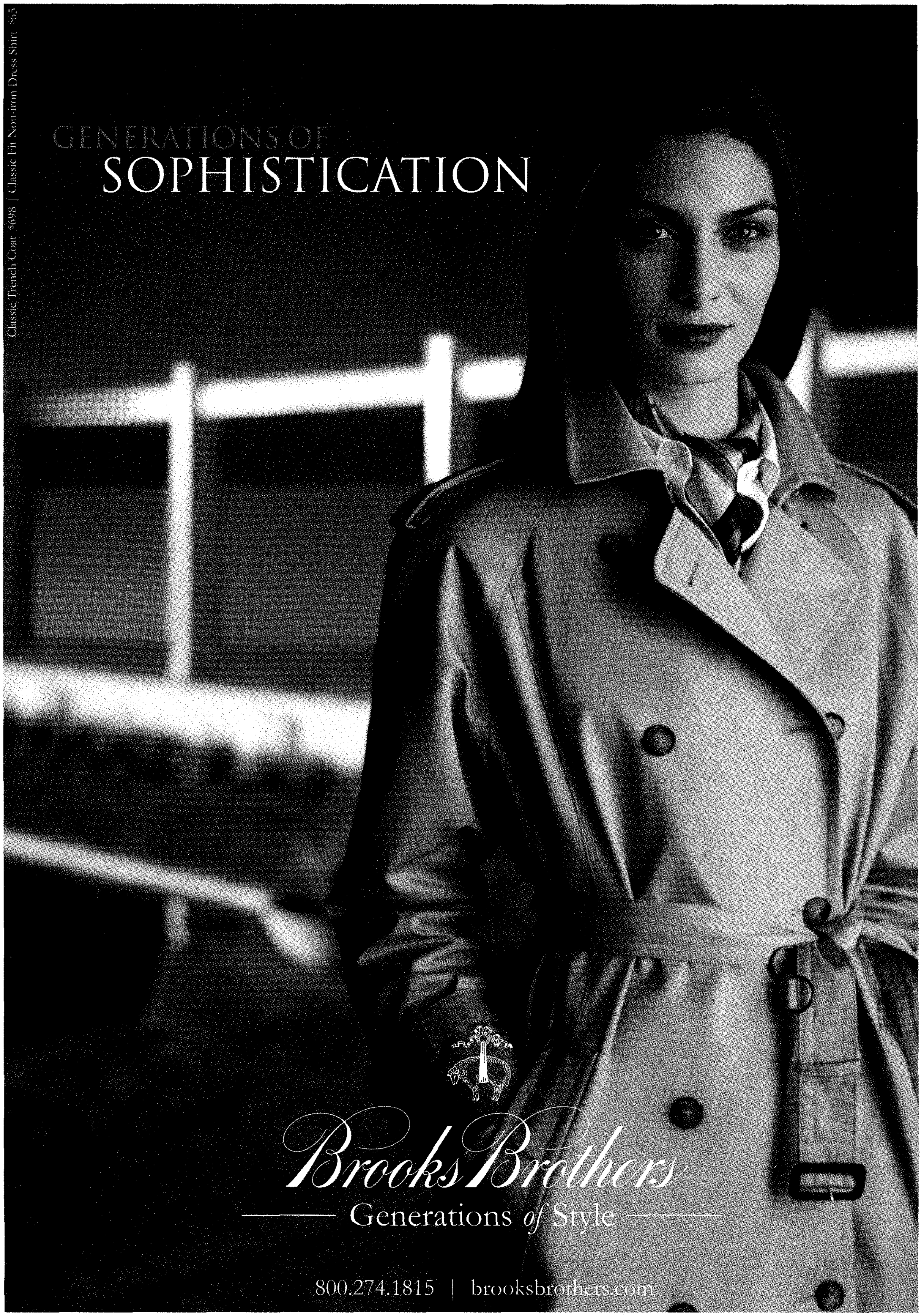
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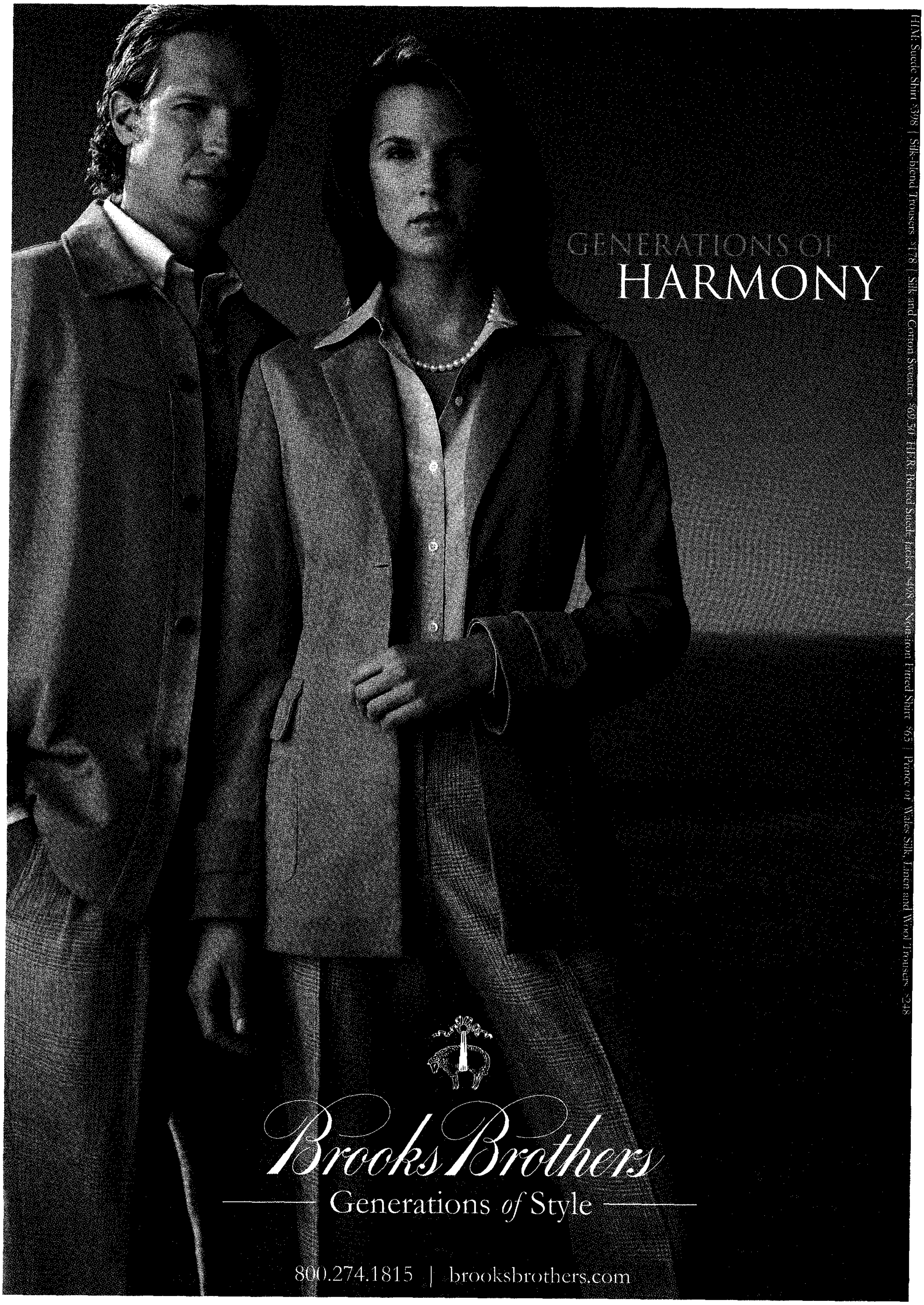
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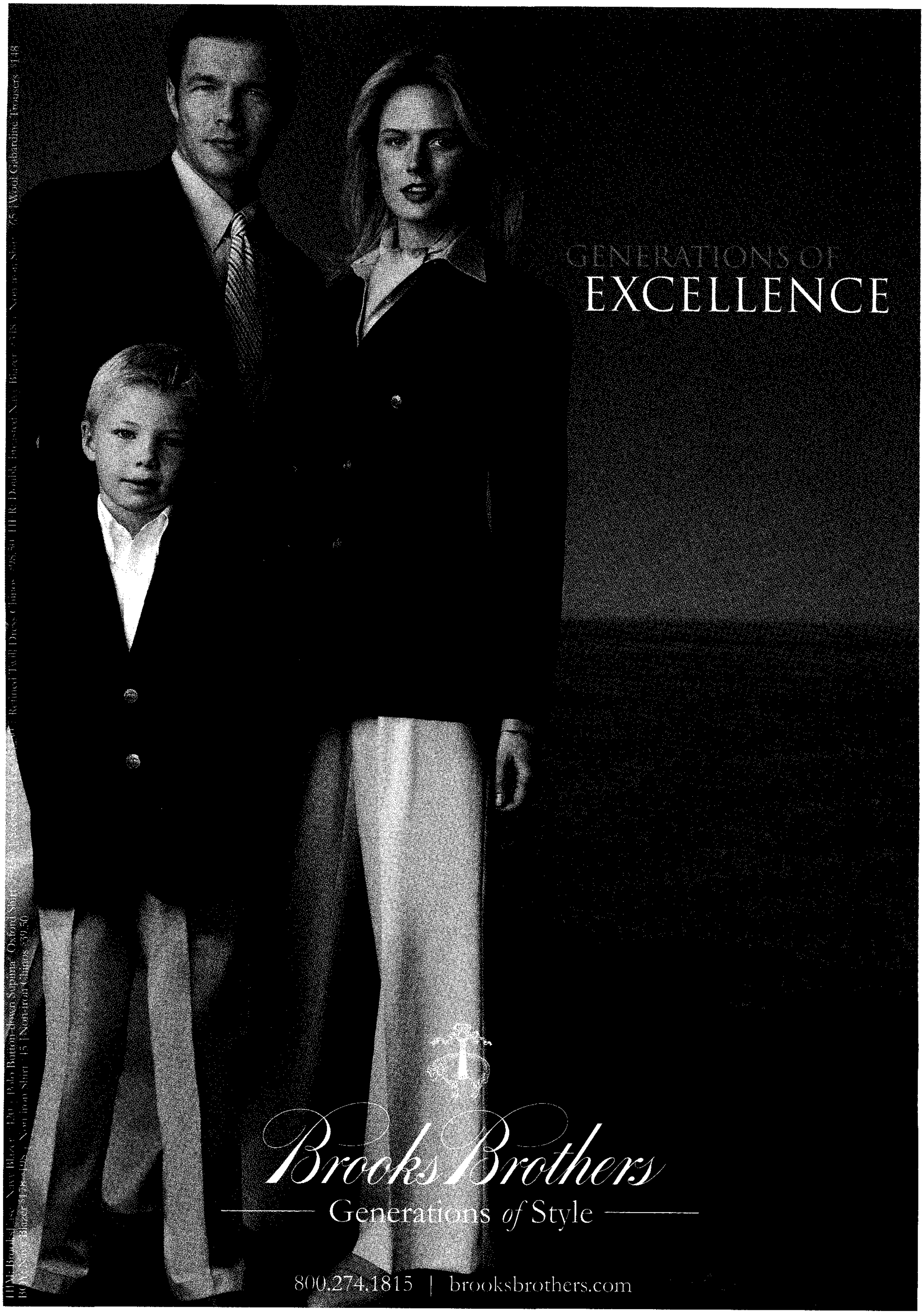
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BOY: Navy Blazer $178–$198 | Non-iron Shirt $45 | Non-iron Chinos $39.50

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—Saturdays and Sundays starting March 13: **Blossom Dearie.** Fifty years ago, no one sounded like Dearie, and today she's still the only one. Her wispy vocal instrument nails the sly lyrics of David Frishberg's "I'm Hip" and "My Attorney Bernie" and coaxes the bittersweet tinge out of "Bye Bye Country Boy."

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through March 14: While a whole new generation of jazzmen has taken up the Hammond B3 organ, the triumvirate of **Jimmy McGriff, Dr. Lonnie Smith,** and **Joey DeFrancesco** is strictly an old-school affair. (DeFrancesco may be considerably younger than his partners, but he's thoroughly absorbed their grits-and-gravy aesthetic.) The saxophonist **Houston Person**—a Hammond man's best friend—will be on hand to provide funky tonal contrast. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—The mellow-toned Johnny Hartman may be remembered today for just one album, "John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman," but what an album it is. From March 11-14, **Kevin Mahogany** pays tribute to the late vocalist, with assistance from the **Eric Reed** trio and the saxophonist **David (Fathead) Newman.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 11-13: If Jimmy Scott, Andy Bey, and Bill Henderson arose phoenixlike to fly again, what's to stop the singer **Jackie Paris**? An associate of Charles Mingus decades ago, Paris represents the height of authentic bebop vocalizing. March 15: The singer and guitarist **Juan-Carlos Formell** and the *batalero* **Roman Diaz** update Afro-Cuban music with their Cuban Mission project.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—The drummers **Andrew Cyrille** and **Victor Lewis** have played with everyone from Coleman Hawkins and Cecil Taylor to Stan Getz and David Sanborn. The two go head to head in percussive duets during the early set on March 16. Later that night, the new-jazz saxophonist **Steve Lehman,** an associate of Anthony Braxton, gets support from the bassist **Mark Dresser** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through March 14: **Paul Motian and the Electric Bebop Band.** Having helped alter conventional jazz drumming as we know it, Motian shouldn't be expected to get all reverential when it comes to playing bebop. The innovative percussionist's foray into the jazz past is usually fleshed out by two electric guitars, an electric bass, and two saxophones. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The name Chuck Close instantly conjures images of giant gridded portraits, tight and deadpan in Photo-Realist black-and-white in the seventies, with more recent versions dissolving in loose lozenges of color. **"Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration"** shows that all the portraiture of self and others went along with constant experiments in the practice of printmaking. Etching, silk screen, linoleum and woodblock prints, and hand-constructed pulp-paper multiples are tracked through various proof states, and actual woodblocks, etched copper panels, and other studio paraphernalia also appear. Through April 18. ♦ Terra-cotta models were sculptors' preparatory sketches, clay versions of what would later be carved from stone. More than a hundred of them are on view in **"Playing with Fire: European Terracotta Models, 1740-1840,"** including diminutive works by Flaxman, Houdon, and Clodion. The eighteenth-century art star Antonio Canova's models—he called them *invenzioni*—are among the roughest and most spontaneous. His "Penitent Magdalen" and "Lamentation Over the Dead Abel" show what his sublime marbles never could: the hand of the artist and the heat of inspiration, captured forever in hasty tool marks and globs of modelled clay. The preponderance of Venuses, Cupids, and Ariadnes should come as no surprise, since the golden age of neoclassicism falls in the middle of this period. Through April 25. ♦ Satyrs, nymphs, muses, and demigods in attitudes of pastoral abandon populate **"Poets, Lovers, and Heroes in Italian Mythological Prints,"** a survey of classical scenes dating from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. A chunky Pegasus smiles at a boyish Apollo beside a sacred stream; a square-jawed Ganymede is lifted into the air by a hulking Jovian eagle. Images by Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo stand out among the Salvator Rosas and Carraccis. The Tiepolos spent time in Spain, and one can see how their cool, simple lines influenced Goya. Through May 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective"** showcases nearly three hundred and fifty works spanning five decades, including drawings, sculptures, videos, installations, and paintings. Opens March 12. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Umberto Boccioni joined the Milanese Futurists in 1909, but it was not until 1911, after a trip to Paris, that his festive genre and figure studies—especially portraits of his formidable, white-haired mother, his favorite subject—evolved into the dynamic "force-lines" of Futurism. **"Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-Garde in Milan and Paris"** examines the transformations of these crucial years, culminating in the creation of the huge portrait of his mother as a modern saint. Along the way, the show examines works by Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, and Medardo Rosso, with Boccioni's own famous bronze "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space" thrown in as a glowing footnote. Through May 9. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—A hundred and eight artists and collaborative groups have contributed to the 2004 Whitney Biennial, the museum's seventy-second review of contemporary American art. Opens March 11. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-517-2742)—Fifteen artists from the Pacific Islands show the flip side of tourist-brochure imagery in **"Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific."** Andrea Feeser and Gaye Chan, working as Downwind Productions, package bits of concrete from Waikiki resorts and sell them as souvenirs. Michel Tuffery's sculptures of fish are made with canned-fish tins, reminding one of the sad irony that the countries of the overfished Pacific now need to import seafood. Lisa Reihana drafts Maori friends and family to remake nineteenth-century ethnographic "Native Portraits." The show also includes works of simple beauty, like John Ioane's installation in which images of light on the sea's surface are projected onto a shell-lined walkway. Through May 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Shock of the Old: Christopher Dresser."** Examples of the Victorian-era designer's mass-produced housewares. Through July 25. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 9; Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

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GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (212-838-6690)—**"Volvelles: The Magnificent Art of Circular Charting"** is an exhibit of rotating charts made of graduated disks of paper (the word "volvelle" comes from the Medieval Latin for "wheel"). Included here are tools to determine recipes for cocktails, calculate the gestation periods of cattle, diagnose skin diseases, encode diaries, formulate stain removers, analyze handwriting, and conjugate German verbs. The Mystical Wheel of Omar and other fortune-telling devices are paired with a set of Biblegraphs, from the mid-twentieth century, which suggest a week's worth of scripture for any of eighteen problems, including "Do you have a 'nameless fear'?" and "Are you beset by temptation?" Most beautiful are the volvelles that look to the stars; a 1540 edition of Peter Apianus' "Astronomicum Caesareum" includes elaborately illustrated, hand-colored charts for tracking the paths of heavenly bodies and the progress of illnesses. Through April 24. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The lure of the open road becomes a sort of joke in Richard Sigmund's fifty-three-foot-long eleven-panel painting, **"Pacific Coast Highway"** (1984). Sigmund re-creates with deadpan accuracy the look and dimensions of the famous strip of pavement, complete with white and yellow lines and markings. Reduced to a cross-section, the road becomes a relic—perhaps even an archeological one to New Yorkers unaccustomed to pavement without potholes. Through May 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

PAT DE GROOT
De Groot has been painting the same bit of Atlantic Ocean for years, but her small, square, brushy panels don't repeat themselves. She asks the old Impressionist question—how does the view change in fog, or moonlight, or bright sun?—and, like the plein-air painters of the nineteenth century (and unlike their umpteenth-generation Cape Cod knockoffs), she responds by playing matter-of-factly with grids and tones, optics and moods. Through March 13. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050.)

PETER ROSTOVSKY
Rostovsky's paintings are jokes in the grand American tradition of landscape as a psychological proscenium framing human activity. In his "Swimmers" series, lone bathers are isolated in vast but tranquil seas, bobbing in compartmentalized leisure. The viewer feels lost in the same ocean, hailing friends who never turn to look. In "Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower," a little pair of sculpted hikers gaze at a sublime painted view of Yosemite. Through March 20. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

ADAM STRAUS
Paintings encased in lead frames ironically update Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic landscapes. "The Conquerers" depicts an "Iwo Jima"-style grouping of mountain climbers planting an American flag while another climber captures the moment on film. In "S.O.S.: I've Gotten Up Here But I Can't Get Down," a tiny figure flashes a distress beacon from a faraway peak. In Straus's version of "Man Contemplating the Moon," the sky watcher has an S.U.V., and a radio tower keeps him company while he ponders the cosmos. Through March 20. (Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-3550.)

"THEY STILL DRAW PICTURES: CHILDREN'S ART IN WARTIME FROM THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR TO KOSOVO"
Most of the images here were produced by displaced Spanish children in the thirties; the rest come from Burma, Croatia, Poland, and a dozen other hot spots. What's astonishing is how consistent the artists are. For decades, children have drawn crumpled buildings and columns of smoke and bloodied figures in much the same way; airplanes and helicopters are always rendered with the obsessive care children reserve for machinery. The text they added to many of the drawings is especially moving. Through April 3. (AXA, 787 Seventh Ave., at 51st St. 212-554-4818.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SLATER BRADLEY
A video and a series of photographs celebrate the cult of Kurt Cobain, who killed himself ten years ago this April. Bradley, twenty-nine years old and something of a cult hero himself, is a seasoned channeler of adolescent despair. Here he perpetrates what might be called a true hoax: a convincing video of a performance by Nirvana—a "lost tape" with mythic status among Cobain fans—with lip-synching and air guitar by friends of Bradley. Cobain is played by Ben Brock, who also poses in character for the show's photographs. The effect is a sensational, cold excitement, haunted by death in a thoroughly lively way. Through March 27. (Team, 527 W. 26th St. 212-279-9219.)

TABLES FOR TWO

PUBLIC
210 Elizabeth St. (212-343-7011)—This multilevelled space, which was formerly a muffin bakery, has been outfitted with the trappings of mid-century bureaucracy. The effect is somewhere between Kafka and the D.M.V. There's a wall of post-office boxes just past the hostess and a case of library-card-catalogue drawers by the coat check; the lamps above the bar appear to have been salvaged from a grammar-school hallway. The heavy steel bathroom doors have crinkled-glass windows, the meaningless office numbers 306 and 304, and, best of all, working mail slots.

The menus are typed on ledgerlike cards and delivered on miniature clipboards; very efficient, but some of the ingredients sound like they've been misfiled. Snails and oxtails are tucked into the same ravioli—never mind the accompanying clutter of pickled shiitake mushrooms, dried tomatoes, pea shoots, and smoked-paprika oil. The snapper succumbs to a cloying purée of vanilla, truffle, and celeriac, and the giant roasted prawns rest uneasily on their bed of al-dente black beans, asparagus, and lump crabmeat.

Two of the chefs are New Zealanders famous for the Providores, in London, and the kitchen is not unskilled—the main ingredient of each dish can be pretty wonderful. Roast venison loin with fig-walnut chutney and chump-cut lamb with mint yogurt have the least distracting garnishes, and their flavors are superb. If only you could order "kangaroo, medium rare, hold the coriander falafel with tahini-lemon sauce," or "seared foie gras, no coffee-and-cardamom scone, no candied ginger-lemon sauce, no pumpkin-seed oil."

Desserts don't need to make sense the way entrées do, and the peanut panna cotta with lime-wasabi jelly and the chocolate-polenta cake with sweet-corn ice cream are satisfying and kind of funny. The whole thing might be a conceptual experiment on the order of El Bulli, Ferran Adrià's avant-garde restaurant on the northeastern coast of Spain—without the benefit of a staff chemist. In any case, the lively crowd doesn't seem to mind. (Open daily for dinner and on weekends for brunch. Entrées $18-$25.)

—*Owen Phillips*

JUDY CHICAGO
Thirty-five years of "femmerotica" by the creator of "The Dinner Party." Anaïs Nin's "Delta of Venus" and the Biblical Song of Songs are illustrated by etchings, lithographs, and aquatints in a graphic style recalling Georgia O'Keeffe. The "CatErotica" series of watercolors finds a woman and her kitty interacting in ways that might interest the A.S.P.C.A. Twenty more pieces are on view at PowerHouse (68 Charlton St.), which has just published Chicago's "Fragments from 'The Delta of Venus.' " Through March 13. (ACA, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-8080.)

ELANA GUTMANN
A series of small paintings in thin, scrubbed washes of pale blue, salmon pink, and sunset yellow suggest a watery dream world of shape and color. It's as if the stormy atmospherics of J. M. W. Turner had been modified by feminist ideas about interiority and the receptive body. Through March 18. (Perimeter, 511 W. 25th St. 212-675-1585.)

CHRIS HANSON AND HENDRIKA SONNENBERG
Hanson and Sonnenberg have, apparently, learned all there is to know about carving polystyrene insulation board, which comes in pleasing sea-and-sky blues and greens. These efforts have produced an ersatz world of failed electronic communication, with a snakelike bank of microphones and cords, a wall of speakers and amplifiers, and a mangled sports scoreboard that seems to have crashed from the ceiling. If only they had stopped there—the show is, alas, crowded with other kinds of sculpture and a wall of precious and unconvincing drawings. Through March 27. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710.)

NICKY HOBERMAN / JEANNE DUNNING
Three large pastels and a twelve-foot-long painting by Hoberman set imagery of little girls, cats, flowers, and foliage adrift and atumble in shallow space. Odd, intense color runs to hot pinks and purple, aqua and indigo. The work's molten formal energy is refrigerated by the big-eyed, matter-of-fact looks of the children, whose innocence may be questionable. Dunning's new color photographs present tongues, noses, and the like poking through holes in fabric; semitransparent plastic geek masks set askew on the faces that wear them; and a young woman asleep in bedding from which emerges an extra arm. Through March 27. (Feigen Contemporary, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500.)

SEAN LANDERS
Landers, the bard of art-drunk narcissism, is blue: "failure," "boor," "fool" read the hand-lettered texts in his latest stream-of-consciousness paintings. "Now it's over," another picture moans, with reference to the artist's heyday as a downtown darling. But the show also includes surprising, wonderfully piquant bronze fantasy characters—an elephant king, a football-headed duck, a satyr with donkey ears and prong horns—that Landers made to amuse himself and his four-year-old daughter. Could it be that mere art is the love-hungry whiner's last, and best, resort? Through April 3. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

CHARLES LONG
In the six years since his last New York show, the artist who once encouraged viewers to dig into mounds of pink modelling clay has grown more austere. His new show, "Winter Work," is appropriately chilly and white. In "The Direction of My Home" and "The Fire Theft," long shadows are cast across the walls by a chunky plaster sconce and a huge aluminum armature, respectively. "A Marvelous Science" is a constellation of ceramic blobs inspired by his young son's drawings, and "The Scattered Tamarack" is sculpted of lumps of plaster and papier-mâché mixed with the ashes of the family dog. Through March 20. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

ROBERT LONGO
Perhaps it would be difficult to make a boring picture of an atomic mushroom cloud; perhaps, too, in the age of missing and disputed W.M.D.s, it would be difficult to make a purely aesthetic one. But Longo nearly succeeds on both counts. With their rich charcoal blacks and raw, stark whites, their roiling smoke and dire connotations, his huge drawings of explosions (based on photographs from A-bomb-era textbooks) are so appealing formally that one forgets, for a moment, what they depict. Such beauty is meant to be didactic, catching us in the guilty moment of enjoying something hideous. But even the old paradox of gorgeous terror is stylish rather than sublime here. Through March 27. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

ALAN SARET
A beautiful show of sculpture and drawings, dating from 1967 to 1986, rescues from obscurity one of the finest innovators of post-minimalism. The amorphous and yet fiercely energized sculptures are mostly bush-like snarls, on the walls and the floor, of steel, copper, or nickel wire, often punctuated with internal knots. The drawings deploy skittery marks that evoke the effects of hallucinogens. A strong formal idea—volume without mass—rules the show. Saret's development as an artist slacked off early, but his signal works still smack of the new. Through March 27. (James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

YOSHIHIRO SUDA
Suda's sculptures address the desire for, and ultimate disappointment in, mimetic illusion. Single flowers—a rose, a tulip—made of hand-carved and painted wood, hover near the ceiling. The tulips are disintegrating, and a single rose petal has wafted across the room. The artifice is impressive, but the effect is sterile. Through April 3. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

AMAR KANWAR
The artist's thirty-minute film "A Season Outside," which was shot in India and Pakistan in

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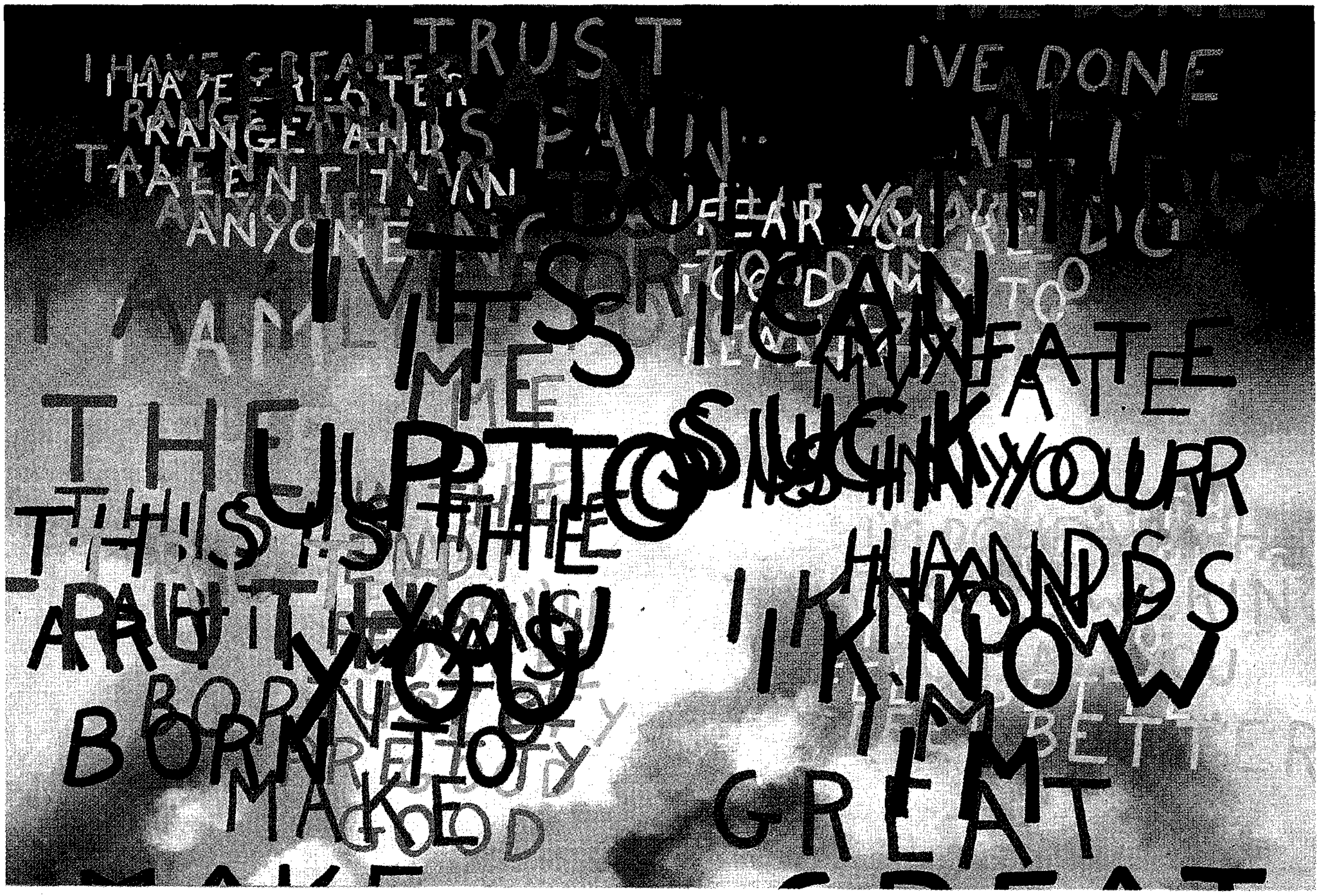
1997, contemplates the hostilities between the two nations. The opening sequence follows two cadres of border guards as they high-step through the nightly ritual of gate-closing and flag-folding. Kanwar's voice-over draws heavily on writings by Gandhi, and his tone of quiet elegy never simplifies or sentimentalizes. Through March 20. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

"SUBURBAN HOUSE KIT"
The architect Adam Kalkin reinvents the mail-order house made famous by Sears in the past century. Here it's modular and modern, constructed from recycled shipping containers and tricked out by artist-collaborators. Options include Tobias Rehberger's colored paper garden, a levitating Mylar backyard sculpture by Martin Kersels that recalls Andy Warhol's "Silver Clouds," Haim Steinbach's pantry display of miniature tubs and commodes, and Aernout Mik's video installation of people tearing things up in a workshop/storage room. You can order the whole package for $368,400. Through March 27. (Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)



A new show of Sean Landers's paintings and sculptures, at Andrea Rosen (see Galleries—Chelsea).

GALLERIES-BROOKLYN

SHARON CORE
In the nineteen-sixties, Wayne Thiebaud painted food from the Automat. Core has now actually prepared the iced cakes, pie slices, and crustless white-bread sandwiches in Thiebaud's pictures and then photographed them. Paintings based on photographs of food have become photographs of real food based on paintings, and the suggestion of workerless automation is forced into a comically hands-on recognition of the effort involved in making anything. Through March 22. (Bellwether, 335 Grand St. 718-387-3701.)

GLENN GOLDBERG / RICHARD VAN BUREN
Perhaps it is Van Buren's painted-plastic curlicues, in bright flesh tones and metallic shades, that make Goldberg's tightly patterned acrylics on canvas seem like folk art. The largest one, a mandala in red, orange, and an almost fluorescent green, might be a schematic for a quilt by Howard Finster's grandmother. It's called "Wish," like every other Goldberg piece here except a delicate watercolor on the wall, "Wish Expanding," which blooms with quiet persistence. Through March 22. (Sideshow, 319 Bedford Ave. 718-486-8180.)

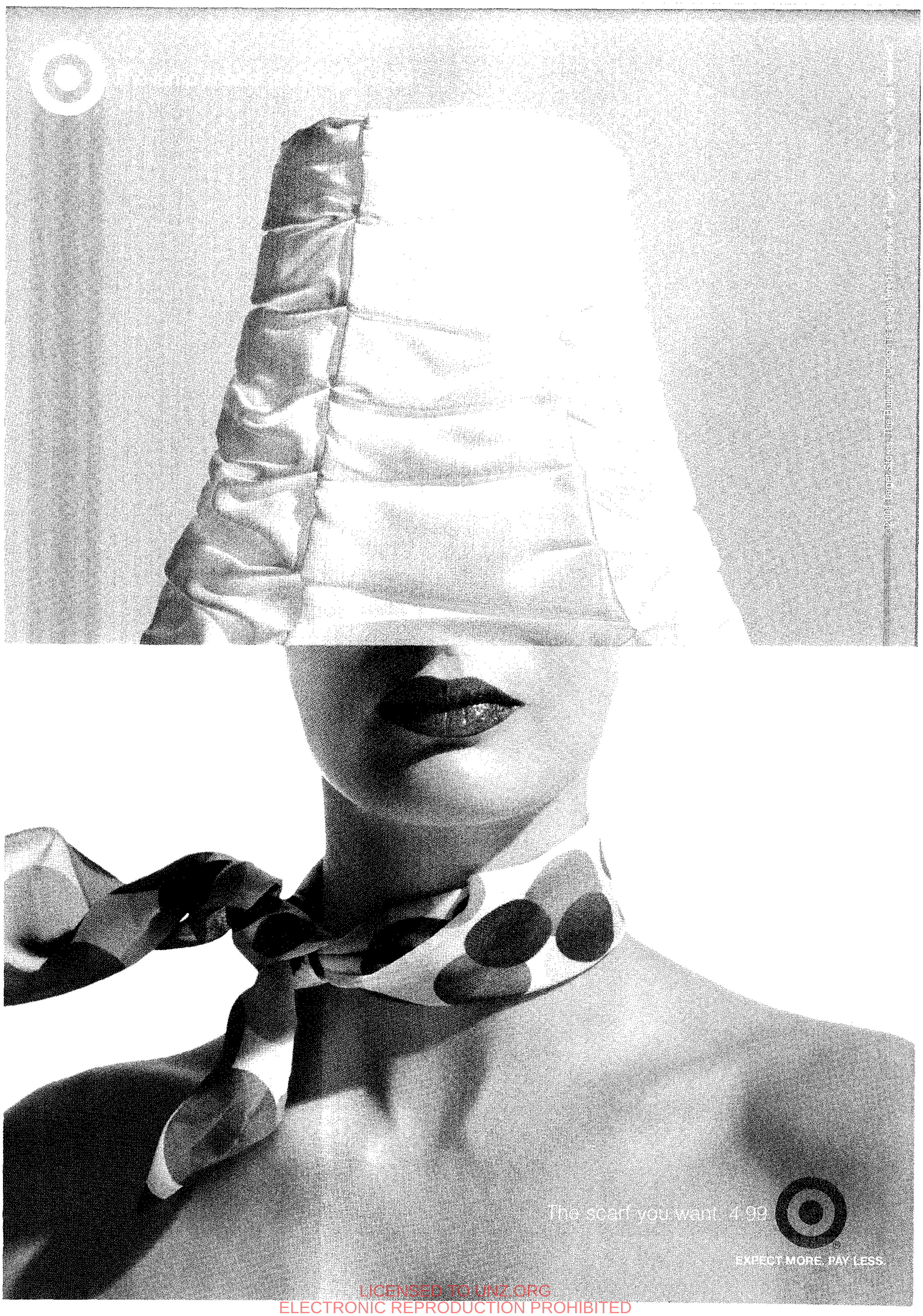
PHOTOGRAPHY

BILL HENSON
Henson's elegant, formal photographs—of battered landscapes and fragile, wispy youths—resemble nothing so much as Flemish still-lifes; rarely has color photography captured as profoundly the furry texture of nighttime. In one image, a girl's skin takes on the iridescence of insect wings against a water-dark background. In another, perhaps the most intimate picture in the show, a young woman clad in a bluish shift seems to float over a glittering smear of lights, her arm listing by her side. Through March 13. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

LOTTE JACOBI
A fourth-generation photographer (her great-grandfather opened the Atelier Jacobi in Prussia in the early eighteen-forties), Jacobi, who was born in 1896, chronicled Weimar-era Berlin when she was young, making emotionally complex portraits of Lotte Lenya, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Karl Kraus, and many other artists and intellectuals. Her 1934 photograph of the dancer Harald Kreutzberg—a bald man with downcast, heavily made-up eyes, outstretched hands, and a slightly twisted posture—is an elegant elegy for the Weimar era. Jacobi visited the Soviet Union in the early thirties, returning to Berlin with street scenes of Moscow and rare views of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. After her father died, in 1935, she left Germany and arrived in New York with a tiny portion of her substantial portfolio. The subjects of the portraits she made at her studio here include Albert Einstein (in a leather biker jacket), whom she had known in Germany, Chaim Weitzman, Paul Robeson, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Jacobi moved to New Hampshire in the fifties and continued to experiment with her cameras until her death, in 1990. Through April 11. (Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave. 212-423-3200.)

ANDREA STERN
Family is the theme, subject, and driving force in these twenty large color photographs. Stern belongs to a wealthy Jewish family (she's a pet-food heiress), which she chronicles at weddings, funerals, bar Mitzvahs, and on the beach. Her father tries on a new sports jacket; her grandmother wears a silly hat at her birthday party; a couple on a Disney cruise stare blankly into the middle distance; a man touches his wife's cheek. Stern's images are intimate and perhaps a little voyeuristic, but not cruel—the blue veins and sun-damaged skin notwithstanding. Through March 20. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-4819.)

"IDENTITY"
The three artists in this ambitious show address questions of identity—racial, cultural, and gender—but there's a great deal of playfulness on display here also. Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's sepia-toned diptychs present the artist—an Indian-American—next to a nineteenth-century photograph of American Indians. Sunil Gupta, an Indian living in London, makes wistful diptychs, pairing, for example, a portrait of his averted face with a photograph of a sad-eyed cow standing in a field. It's a graceful evocation of loneliness. The Japanese artist Tomoko Sawada's irrepressible self-portraits as various brides-to-be (the photographs are meant to resemble the photos young women send to prospective grooms through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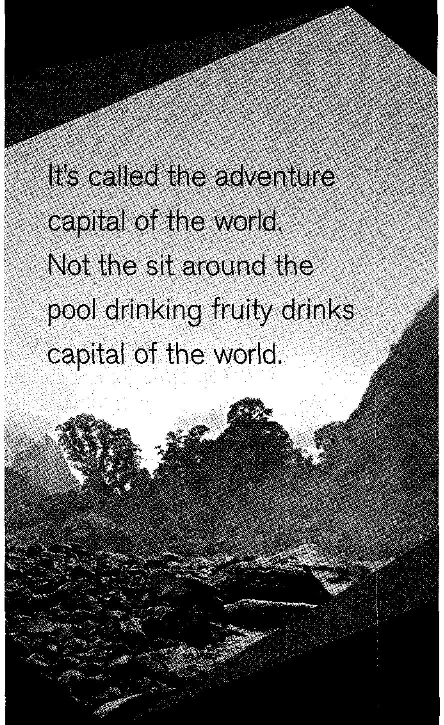
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matchmakers) are pure, unfettered fun. Through March 20. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

Short List

PHILIPPE HALSMAN
Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through March 13.

DAVID HILLIARD
Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through March 20.

RAY K. METZKER
Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through March 20.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
March 11 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: A group of Dale Chihuly's fanciful yet unnerving glass works (including "Ikebana," expected to bring up to thirty thousand dollars) are among the highlights of a sale of twentieth-century decorative arts. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
March 11 at 10 A.M.: A lot of what's on offer at this sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would look fine in a well-appointed parlor—pastel landscapes, both American and French, portraits of ladies in fancy hats, and cheerful New York cityscapes. Particularly lovely, though, are four works by Milton Avery, an artist who domesticated Matisse's use of color and paved the way for the color-field painters (including Mark Rothko, a big fan). On a more curious note, the late-nineteenth-century obsession with ancient Egyptian themes is embodied here by the cabinet-mounted "Triptych of Egyptian Ruins," by Sara Ann Freeman Clarke, a friend of Emerson's and a fellow-transcendentalist. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

DOYLE
March 10 at 10 A.M.: "Doyle at Home," an occasional sale of furniture, decorations, paintings, and design. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

SWANN
March 11 at 10:30 A.M.: An auction of scientific books and general-interest books from the early years of printing. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

"THE ARMORY SHOW"
Marcel Duchamp once compared the legendary 1913 Armory Show to a grand cultural battle, where artists employed "such weapons as derision, contempt, caricature" in defense of new forms of expression. The Armory Show was revived in 1999, and this year's exhibit resolutely builds upon Duchamp's description. Alongside work from James Rosenquist and Vito Acconci, one can find an installation by Kelly Heaton, whose "The Surrogate" consists of sixty-four Tickle Me Elmo dolls obsessively sewn and rewired into a vibrating coat, and paintings by Lisa Ruyter, whose lurid scenes of drunkenness simultaneously celebrate and dissect urban lounge life. (Piers 90 and 92, Twelfth Ave. between 50th and 52nd Sts. 212-645-6440. March 12-15.)

CLASSICAL NOTES

MY WAY
In the days when new compact disks by classical artists were abundant, any composer successful enough to enjoy a close association with a prestigious American orchestra could count on getting at least one major work recorded on a reputable label. But now composers are being forced to look elsewhere, and some, like Augusta Read Thomas, composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1997, are even releasing their recordings themselves on the Web. This could be another sign of classical music's allegedly imminent downfall—or an exciting new way for composers to reach audiences directly.

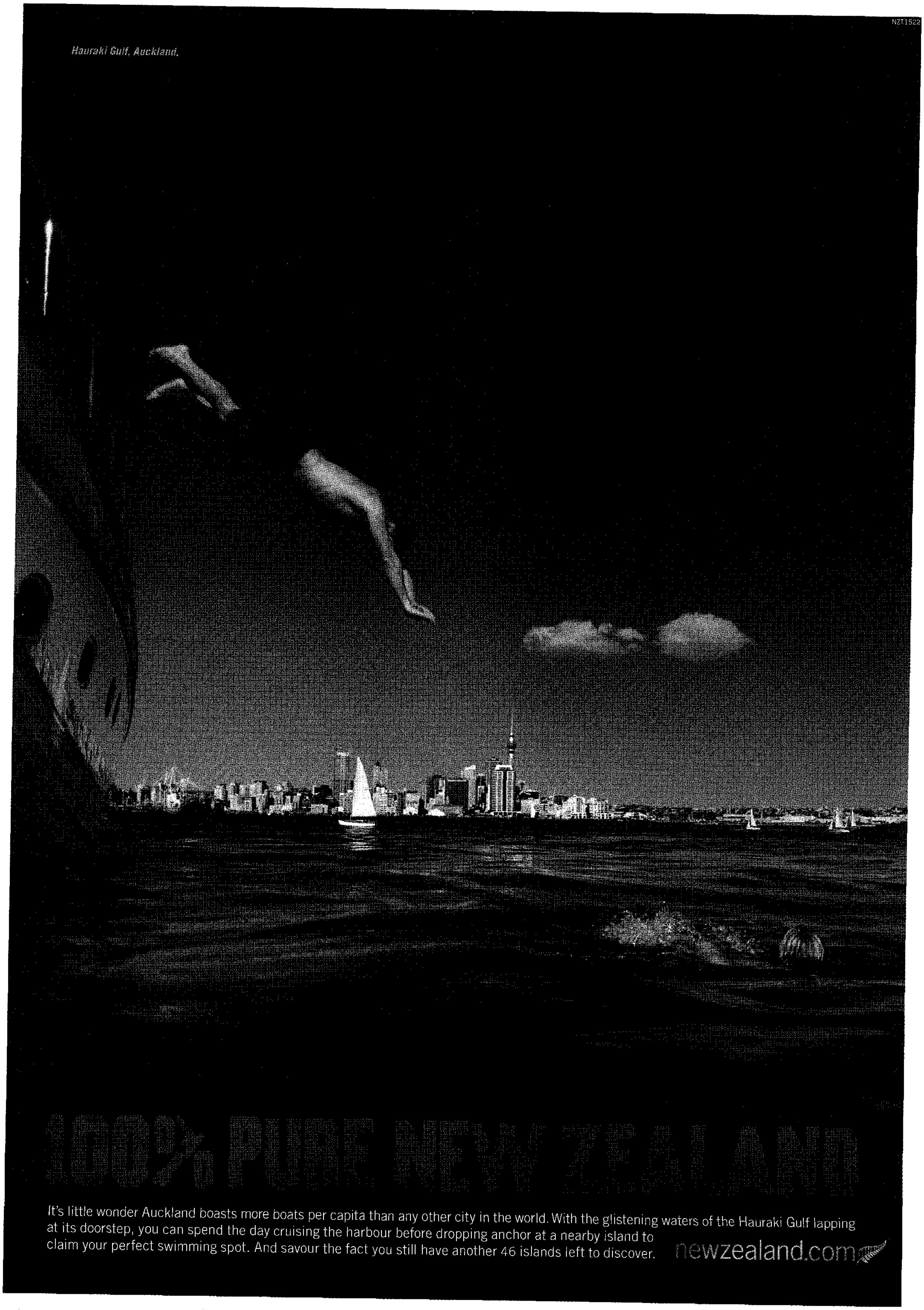
Thomas has gathered an impressive crew for "In My Sky at Twilight" (available on Amazon.com), including the radiant soprano Christine Brandes, the Chicago MusicNow Ensemble (a chamber orchestra drawn mostly from the ranks of the C.S.O.), and Pierre Boulez, no less, conducting. The album bears some hallmarks of a début—the art direction is, well, artless, and the liner notes verge on hagiography. But Thomas, a prodigious talent, is the most accessible ambassador of the new modernism, and the piece, a fierce and jagged take on the love poetry of Sappho, Neruda, and Flaubert, among others, shines with passion and color.

In contrast, the disks offered on Michael Torke's Ecstatic Records outfit (rereleases of recordings originally issued during the nineteen-nineties, which Torke bought outright from Decca after its Argo division folded) are suavely packaged and smartly promoted. (The albums, teasingly titled "One" through "Six," are available at www.michaeltorke.com.) It has always been easy to think of Torke as a cynical purveyor of sophisticated post-minimalist ear candy, but repeated listens to these works—including the three-movement ballet "Ecstatic Orange," played winningly by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Zinman—indicate that several of them are here to stay. Torke's style is instantly recognizable: he has somehow stitched a crazy quilt of influences—Stravinsky's kinetic rhythms, Tchaikovsky's regal brass writing, Reich's process pieces, Madonna's glossy pop—into something solid and sure. "Book of Proverbs," one of the collection's standouts (performed by Edo de Waart conducting the Netherlands Radio Choir and Philharmonic Orchestra), is at once pious and sexy, extravagantly expressive yet closely wrought. It exudes a deliciously intangible sense of joy.

—Russell Platt

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Luciano Pavarotti, trying to make a more graceful Met exit than he did last season, will be eased into two final performances of **"Tosca,"** in which Carol Vaness and Samuel Ramey join him in the leading roles; James Levine conducts. (March 10 and March 13 at 8.) ♦ The Met's revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production of **"L'Italiana in Algeri"** is a thoroughly happy affair; fears that the Russian mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina (whose tone color is less like Chianti than kvass) might not be adept at comedy parts have been deliciously defused. Also featuring such excellent Rossinians as Juan Diego Flórez (no surprise there), Earle Patriarco, and Ferruccio Furlanetto; Levine. (March 11 at 8.) ♦ Otto Schenk's traditionalist production of **"Rigoletto"** may be easy on the eyes, but its literal approach only makes the corniness of the plot that much more obvious. The singers have to save it, and fortunately the Met has slated an impressive cast for this revival, with Ruth Ann Swenson and Ramón Vargas singing Gilda and the Duke and Franz Grundheber taking the title role; Marco Armiliato. (March 12 at 8.) ♦ Marthe Keller's new production of **"Don Giovanni,"** featuring Anja Harteros, Christine Goerke, Hei-Kyung Hong, Thomas Hampson (in the title role), and René Pape; Levine. (March 13 at 1:30 and March 16 at 8.) ♦ Jürgen Flimm—the architect of the Met's bracingly unsentimental production of "Fidelio"—has returned to craft a new staging of **"Salome,"** highlighted by the gorgeously cool-tempered singing of Karita Mattila and the uninhibited conducting of Valery Gergiev; Larissa Diadkova (as Herodias), Siegfried Jerusalem (as Herod), and Albert Dohmen (making his house début in the role of John the Baptist) are along for the ride. (March 15 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)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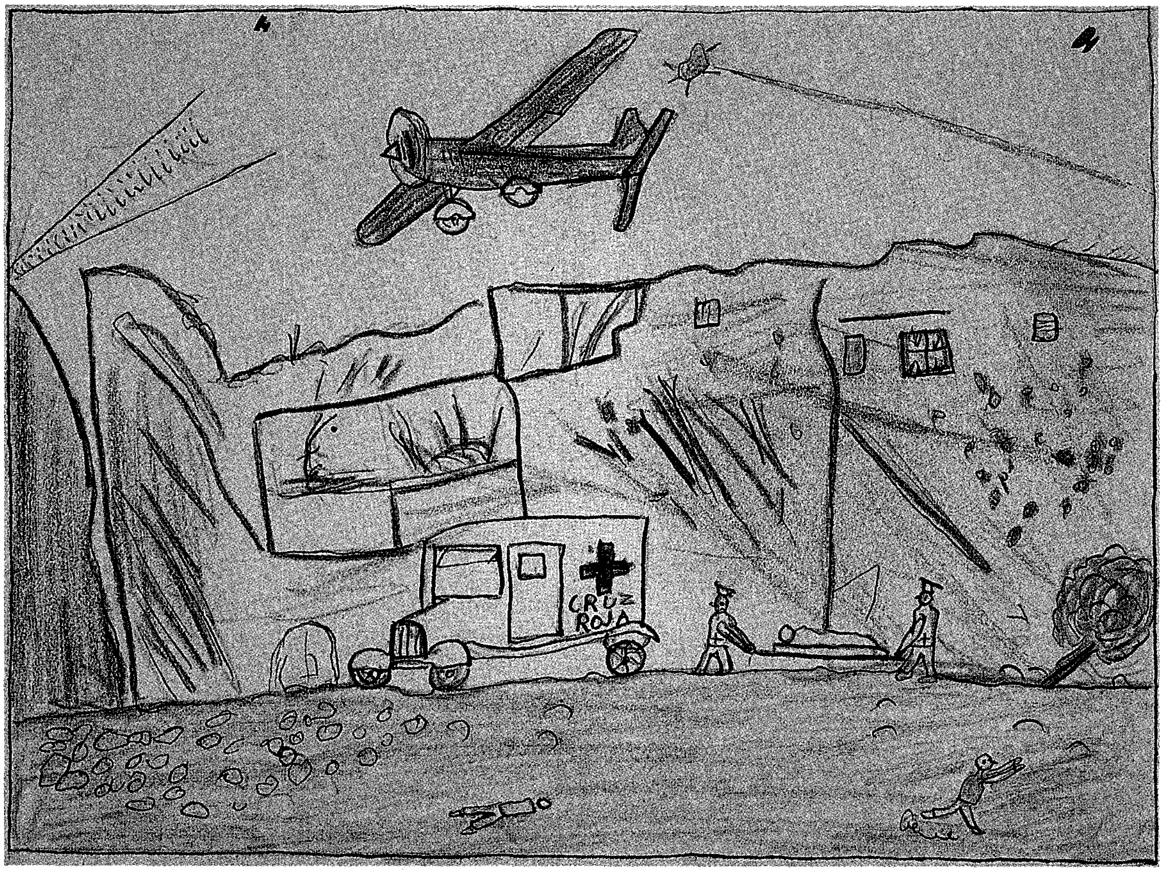

"They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Art in Wartime from the Spanish Civil War to Kosovo," at AXA.

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

"Sweeney Todd," with its solid, sinister story and genuine emotions, is Stephen Sondheim's most operatic musical, and Harold Prince's 1984 City Opera production is justly famous. The West End veteran Elaine Paige, singing the role of Mrs. Lovett, leads the cast along with Timothy Nolen, as the demon barber himself; George Manahan conducts. (March 10 at 7:30.) ♦ The robust American singer Mark Delavan is dominating City Opera's baritone division, much as Beverly Sills once ruled the soprano roost. He joins Paige for three performances as Sweeney this week. (March 11 at 7:30 and March 12-13 at 8.) ♦ With Nolen and Myrna Paris. (March 13 at 1:30.) ♦ The company's well-seasoned production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro"** will be brought back to life by an eager young cast, which this time features Christine Brandes, Pamela Armstrong, Rinat Shaham, Kyle Ketelsen, and Brett Polegato; Steven Mosteller. (March 13 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 212-870-5570.)

AMATO OPERA

New York's beloved pocket opera company offers Offenbach's **"Tales of Hoffmann"** at its matchbox theatre in the East Village. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. March 12-13 at 7:30 and March 14 at 2:30. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "FANFARES AND FIRE"

The brash energy of American postmodernist music is the focus of the A.C.O.'s latest concert, which features Daron Hagen's "Fire Music" (a study on themes from his opera "Shining Brow," which climaxes with the blaze that killed the family of Frank Lloyd Wright) along with curtain-raisers by Libby Larsen ("Fanfare: Sizzle") and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich ("Openings"); all three works have their New York premières. Also on the program are Ned Rorem's roisterous "Lions," Nicholas Maw's more contemplative "The World in the Evening," and the world première of David Schober's "Split Horizon" (a concerto grosso featuring the ensemble Eighth Blackbird). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 10 at 8.)

VOICES OF PRAISE

New York choral singers have a busy week. March 12 at 8 and March 14 at 4: Clara Longstreth, one of the more imaginative choral programmers around, leads her New Amsterdam Singers (a superb amateur group) in a concert of miniatures by such Northern masters as Pärt, Nielsen, Rautavaara (the "Lorca Suite"), Sibelius (the yearning "Rakastava"), and Shostakovich. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lexington Ave. at 88th St. 212-568-5948.) ♦ March 13 at 8: The Gregg Smith Singers lead things off with an eclectic mix of old and new music by Brahms (the Three Motets, Op. 109), Ives, William Mayer, Louise Talma, and Smith himself. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ March 16 at 8: The excellent professional singers of Dennis Keene's Voices of Ascension offer a traditional program of sacred choruses by Verdi (from the Requiem), Rossini, Beethoven (from "Christ on the Mount of Olives"), and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 212-358-1469.)

PHILHARMONIA VIRTUOSI

Richard Kapp conducts his chamber orchestra at the Temple of Dendur in music by Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major, with Martin Kasik) and Haydn (the Symphony No. 94, "Surprise"). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 13 at 7.)

CONCERTO KÖLN

The conductor David Stern—son of Isaac—leads the German early-music band in works by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (the "Italian" Symphony), Schumann (the Cello Concerto, with the gifted cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras, best known for his work in contemporary music), and Wagner (the slow movement from his rarely heard Symphony in C Major). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 13 at 8.)

RUSSIAN CHAMBER CHORUS OF NEW YORK

Nikolai Kachanov's "Benevolence," a work (set to poetry by Nicholas Roerich) that combines elements from the Russian choral tradition with Tuvan, Tibetan, and minimalist influences, is the highlight of the composer-conductor's latest concert with his group. Music by Lassus and Palestrina, as well as some examples of early Russian sacred chant, is also on the program. (Brick Presbyterian Church, Park Ave. at 92nd St. 212-928-1402. March 14 at 4.)

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

March 16 at 8: Mariss Jansons, the ensemble's outgoing music director, has cultivated a narrow repertory of orchestral blockbusters over the years, but he always delivers them with a considerable punch. In the first of two concerts at Carnegie Hall, he conducts music by Beethoven, Prokofiev (the scabrous Second Piano Concerto, with Yefim Bronfman), and Stravinsky (the "Firebird" Suite). ♦ March 17 at 8: Jansons returns to conduct Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

PRO MUSICIS FOUNDATION CONCERTS: ERIKO SANO

The young Japanese pianist—the foundation's latest prize-winner—offers an ambitious program including music by Takemitsu (the delectable "Rain Tree Sketches"), Chopin (the Preludes, Op. 28), Debussy, and Barber (the Sonata, Op. 26, a bravura work written for Horowitz). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 10 at 8.)

MUSIC AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL

March 10 at 8: In a benefit concert for Chamber Music America, the Cassatt String Quartet offers works by Shostakovich (the Piano Quintet, with Craig W. Combs), Daniel Godfrey, and Libby Larsen. ♦ March 14 at 8: The notorious Peter Schickele will set an affable tone for An die Musik's latest concert when he narrates his musical rendition of "The Emperor's New Clothes"; the rest of the pro-

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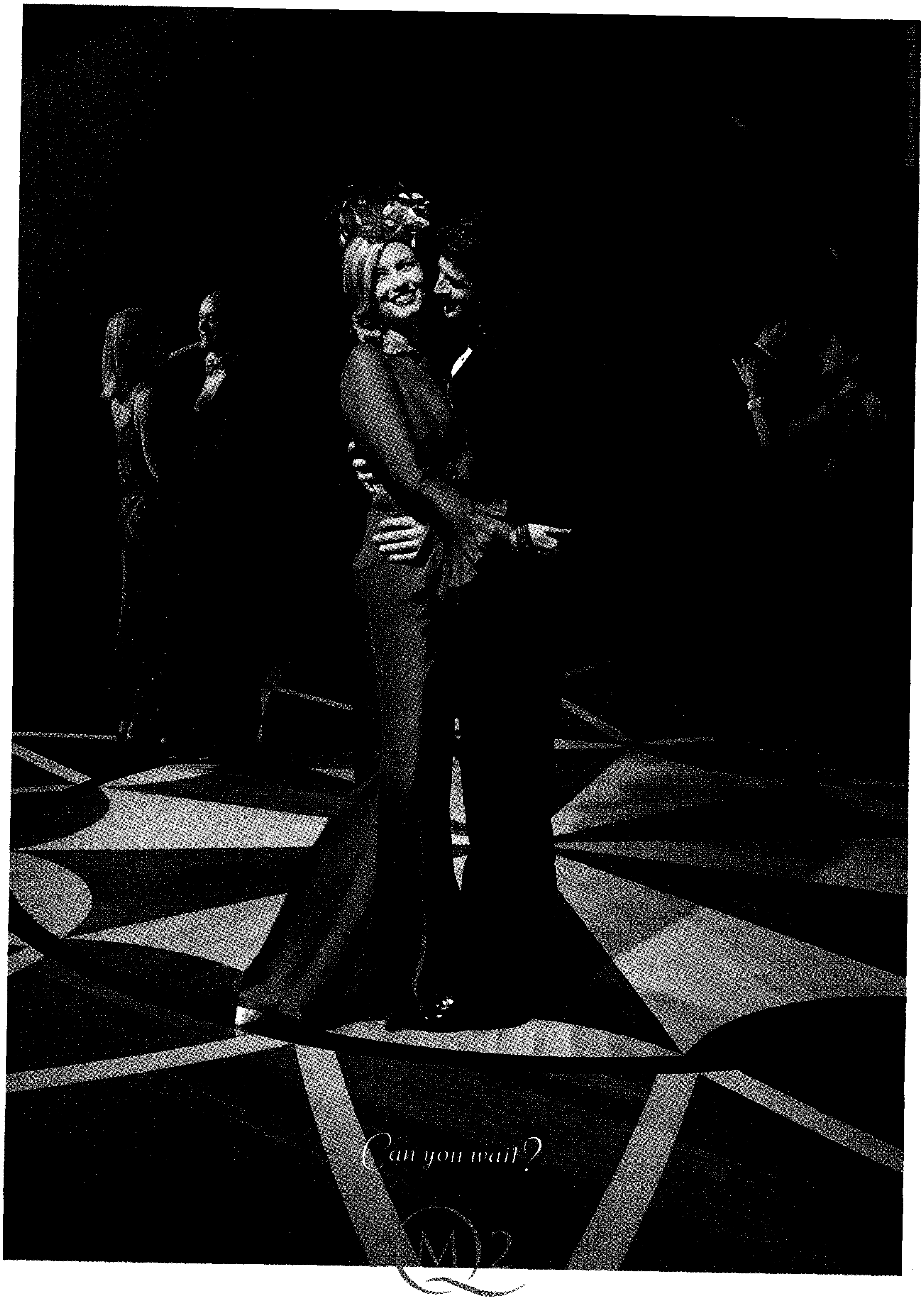
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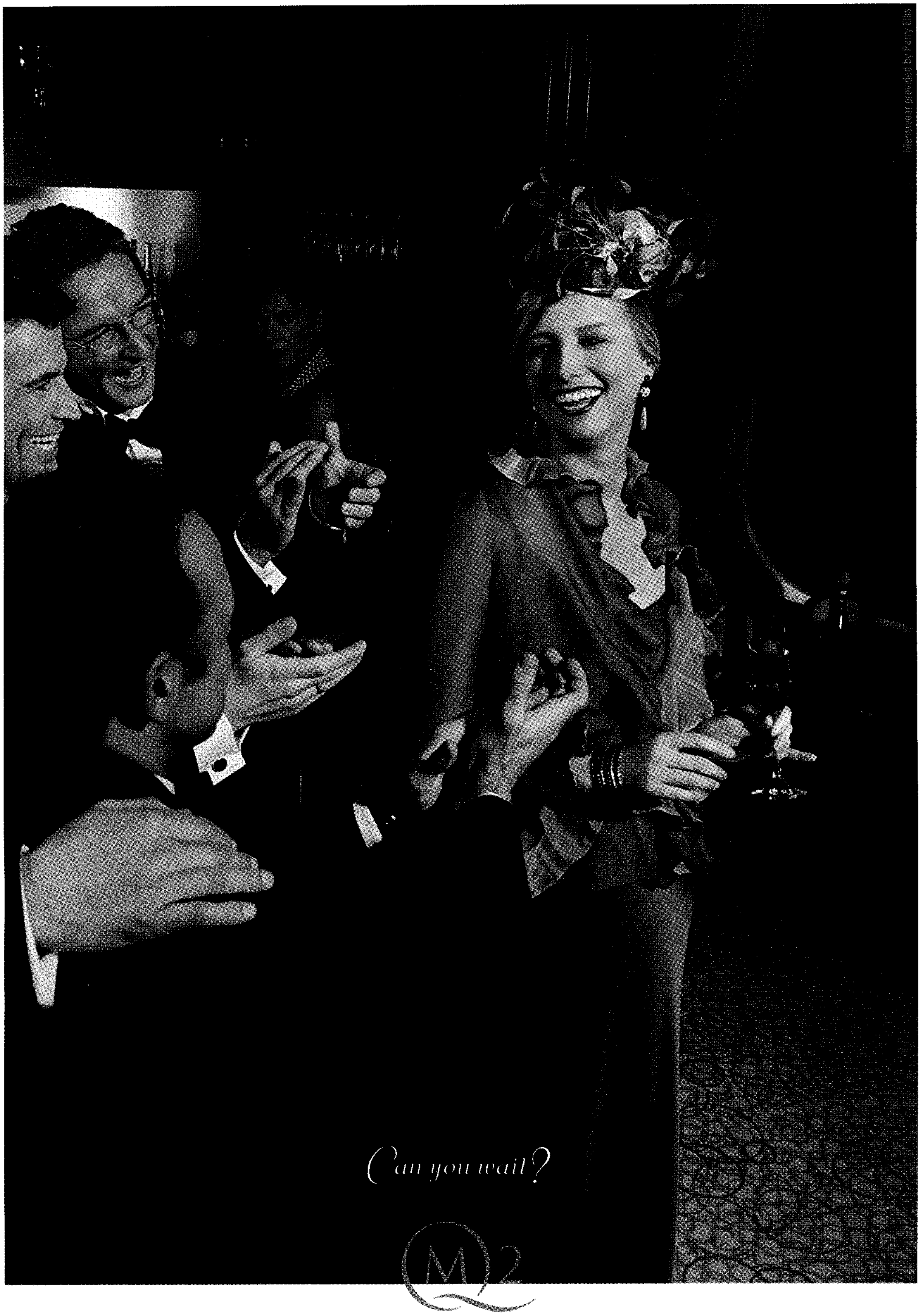Menswear provided by Perry Ellis
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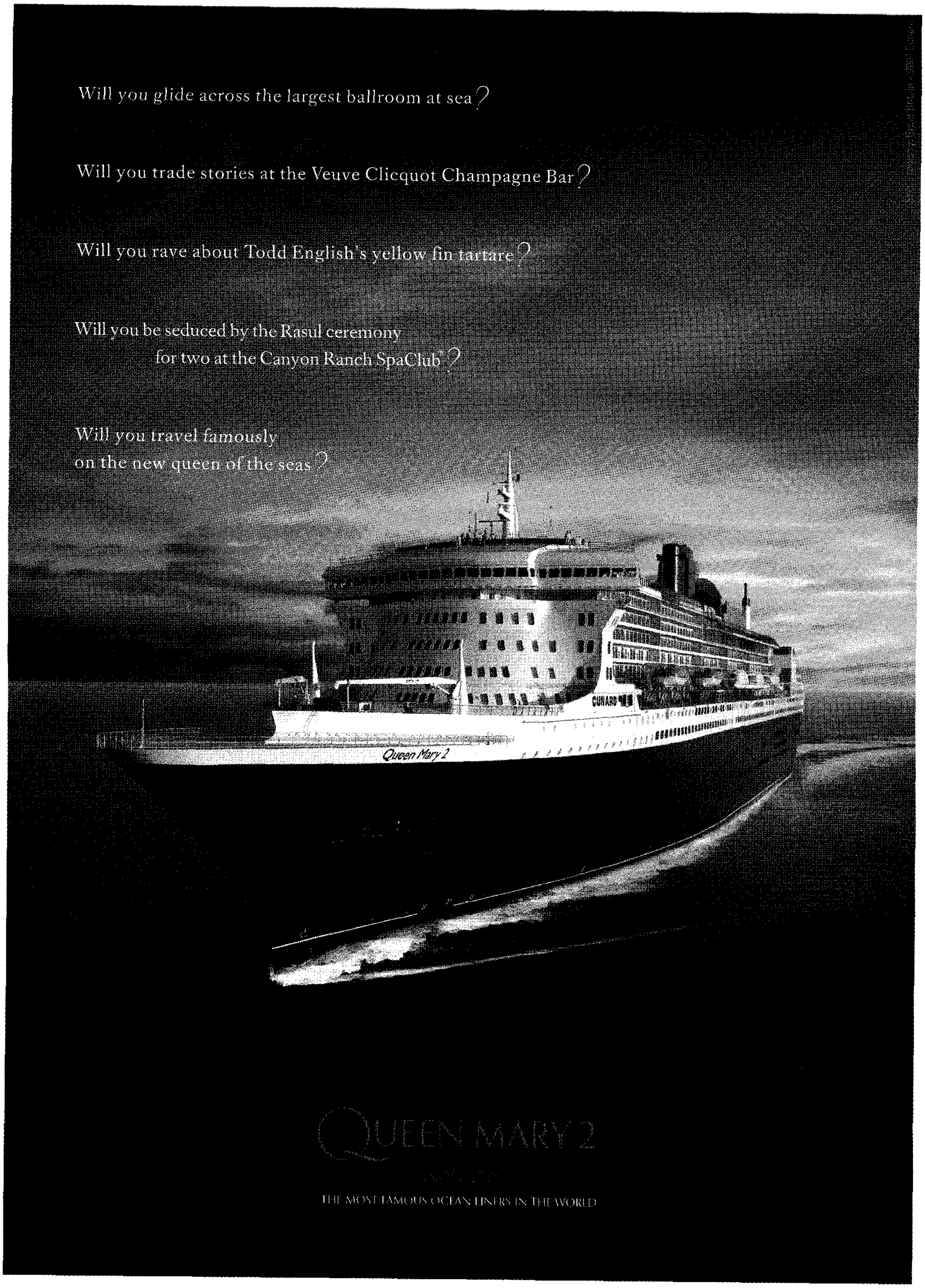
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gram features the chamber ensemble in works by Schubert and Schumann (the Piano Quartet). ♦ March 15 at 8: Speculum Musicae performs a Latin-American-themed concert that features the New York premières of works by Tania León and Diego Luzuriaga and a world première from Mario Davidovsky. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

NEW VOICES CHAMBER ENSEMBLE: "AN EVENING OF VERNON DUKE"
The classically trained composer who wrote "Autumn in New York" receives a tribute concert of his little-known chamber works, along with some standards (sung by Kristi Marks and Danny Gurwin). (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 11 at 6:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Two helpings of Mozart. March 11-12 at 7:30: The violinist Mark Peskanov and the pianist Steven Beck perform two of the duo sonatas (in F Major, K. 547, and in A Major, K. 526) along with some variation pieces on old French songs. ♦ March 13 at 7:30 and March 14 at 4: A bunch of friends (including the hornists Lisa Conway and Angela Cordell) join Peskanov in the Divertimentos Nos. 15 and 17, for chamber ensemble. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "THE ARTISTRY OF IDA KAVAFIAN"
The music of Stravinsky provides the touchstone for two concerts with the Society's wonderful violinist, whose playing is a perfect pairing of beauty and brains. March 11 at 7:30: Ani Kavafian lends her considerable talents to her sister's in Stephen Hartke's puckish suite for two violins, "Oh Them Rats Is Mean in My Kitchen"; also on the program is Bach's Sonata in E Major for Violin and Piano (BWV 1016), and Stravinsky's "Suite Italienne" and "Prélude et Ronde des Princesses," from "The Firebird" (with the pianist Anna Polonsky). (Rose Studio, Rose Building, Lincoln Center.) ♦ March 14 at 5: The pianist Peter Serkin joins Kavafian for more Stravinsky (including the "Pastorale") along with music by Bach and Takemitsu. (Alice Tully Hall.) (212-875-5788.)

Ned Rorem's "Lions" highlights "Fanfares and Fire," a concert by the American Composers Orchestra that also includes music by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and David Schober (a world première, featuring Eighth Blackbird), at Carnegie Hall on March 10.

JOHN HENDRIX

MIKHAIL PLETNEV
The commanding Russian pianist performs masterworks by Schumann (including the Fantasy in C Major) and Tchaikovsky (the Eighteen Pieces, Op. 72, his final music for the instrument). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 11 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE
March 11 at 8: The group So Percussion may have a silly name, but they're dead serious when it comes to performing; their latest concert is a "percussion spectacular" of works by Iannis Xenakis, the late Greek master whose music is at once savage and humane. ♦ March 13 at 8: Angela Hewitt, the young Canadian pianist renowned for her Bach, plays the Master's English Suites Nos. 4 and 6 along with two works by Couperin. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.)

FLORESTAN TRIO
The piano trio performs music by Haydn, Smetana, and Schubert (the Trio in E-Flat Major). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 12 at 7:30.)

MUSIC UNDER CONSTRUCTION: "A CELEBRATION OF MORTON FELDMAN"
Feldman, that most painterly of modern composers, was a great admirer of Mondrian, and his haunting and spare "Piano and String Quartet," from 1985, with its potent silences and stripped-down gestures, mirrors the Dutch painter's hypnotic, spacious style. The evening-length work is presented in an airy Chelsea loft—the ideal setting for Feldman—and it features the crystalline touch of the pianist and Cage specialist Marc Peloquin. (10 E. 18th St. 212-924-7882. March 13 at 8.)

LOS ANGELES GUITAR QUARTET
The fretted foursome offers arrangements of music by Chet Atkins, Pat Metheny, and Stravinsky (the "Pulcinella" Suite), among other works. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 13 at 8.)

NEW YORK EARLY MUSIC SERIES: "CLUB CORNETTO"
The cornettist Jim Miller, with friends, headlines an evening of music by Ciconia, dalla Casa, and other Renaissance swells. (Nour Foundation, 322 W. 108th St. 718-636-5706. March 13 at 8.)

EMERSON STRING QUARTET
Before Mel Gibson came along, other artists contributed their reflections on the Crucifixion. In the first of three rather serious spring concerts, the world's reigning string quartet pairs Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross" with Beethoven's Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-721-6500. March 14 at 4.)

SOHEIL NASSERI
The young American pianist offers another mix of new-music daring (the world première of Martin Kennedy's Piano Sonata) and high-society glamour (the ballerina Paloma Herrera, the guest of honor, will be acknowledged with a performance of Prokofiev's "Ten Pieces from 'Romeo and Juliet'"). Works by Liszt and Mendelssohn (the Scherzo from "A Midsummer Night's Dream," arranged by Rachmaninoff) are also featured. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 16 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"CELEBRATE CORELLI!"
The recent death of Franco Corelli—for decades, the living embodiment of the romantic Italian tenor—has inspired a wealth of reminiscences of the singer, whose performances had a thrilling physicality and lyrical ardor. The Metropolitan Opera Guild sponsors an evening in his honor at Alice Tully Hall that will include not only filmed excerpts from such works as "Tosca" and "Andrea Chénier" but a conversation (led by Nimet Habachy) with five of Corelli's favorite divas: Licia Albanese, Rosalind Elias, Mignon Dunn, Anna Moffo, and Regina Resnik. (212-721-6500. March 12 at 7:30.)

READINGS
March 11 at 7:30: The Poetry Society of America's "Acclaimed/Emerging" series continues with Jorie Graham and C. K. Williams introducing Joshua Beckman. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628.) ♦ March 16 at 7: The writer Doris Lessing reads from her work and discusses it with the radio broadcaster Leonard Lopate. (Music Building, Queens College, Flushing. 718-997-4646.) ♦ March 16 at 7:30: Nicholson Baker offers passages from his latest novel, "A Box of Matches." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
March 10 at 6: The nature writers Margaret Mittelbach and Michael Crewdson, the artist Mark Dion, and the curator Kevin Avery gather for an illustrated talk on the representation of birds at the Metropolitan Museum. (The Lighthouse, 111 E. 59th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 11 at 12:30: The radio host Seamus Blake celebrates Irish Language Week with a talk titled "The Growing Popularity of Irish Language Singers and Music Groups." (Baruch College, 17 Lexington Ave. For more information, call 718-960-6722.) ♦ March 13 at 3:30: The filmmaker Jorgen Leth discusses his work with David Schwartz, the chief film curator for the American Museum of the Moving Image. The talk will be preceded by screenings of Leth's short films, including "New Scenes from America." (American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36 St., Astoria, Queens. 718-784-0077.)

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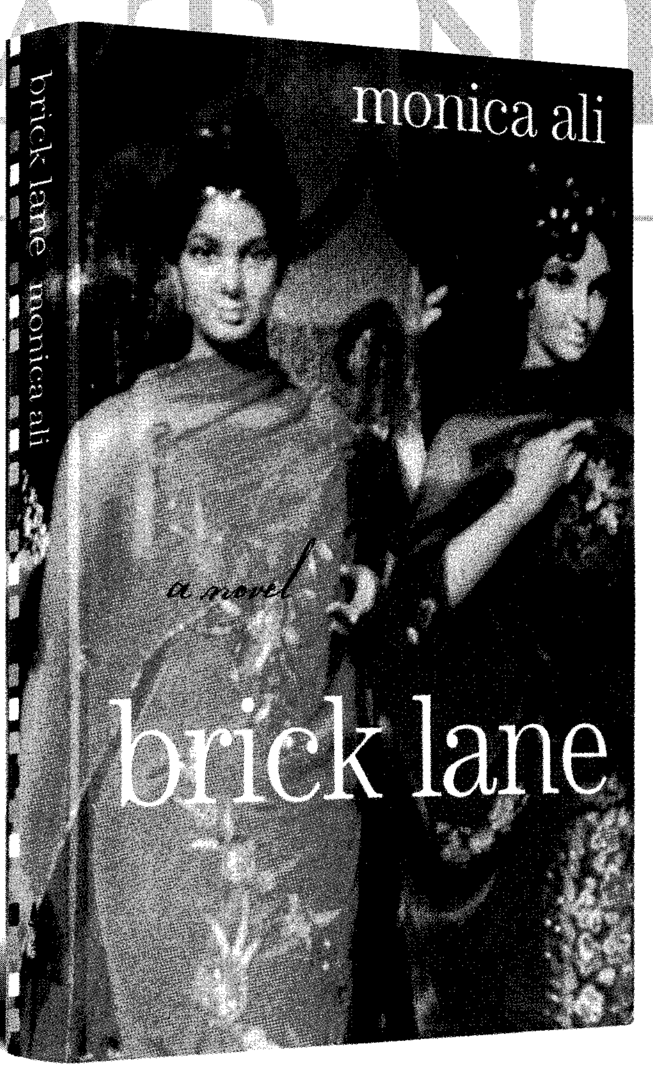
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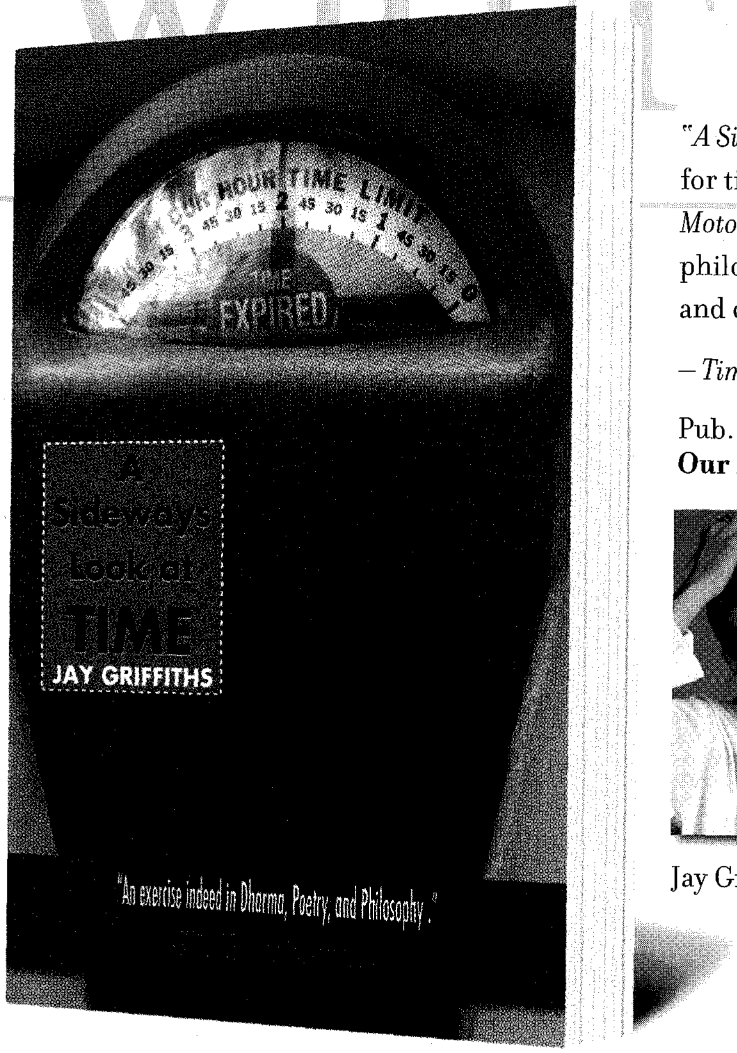
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MOVIES OPENING

AGENT CODY BANKS 2: DESTINATION LONDON
The teen spy (Frankie Muniz) has a new mission in the United Kingdom. Directed by Kevin Allen. Opening March 12.

BROKEN WINGS
Dafna (Orli Zilberschatz-Banai) and her children try to move on with their lives after the sudden death of their husband and father. Nir Bergman wrote and directed this drama set in contemporary Israel. In Hebrew. Opening March 12. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DISTANT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 12. (Cinema Village.)

SECRET WINDOW
A thriller adapted from a Stephen King novella about a novelist (Johnny Depp) who is stalked by a disturbed man (John Turturro) who claims that the writer stole his story. With Maria Bello and Timothy Hutton. Directed by David Koepp. Opening March 12.

SPARTAN
David Mamet wrote and directed this thriller in which a special-operations officer (Val Kilmer) and his protégé (Derek Luke) investigate the kidnapping of the daughter (Kristen Bell) of a high-ranking U.S. government official. With William H. Macy. Opening March 12.

WILBUR WANTS TO KILL HIMSELF
A dark comedy set in Glasgow about a bookstore owner (Adrian Rawlins) who watches over his suicidal brother (Jamie Sives). Directed by Lone Scherfig ("Italian for Beginners"). With Shirley Henderson. Opening March 12. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FILM NOTES

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS
Rémy (Rémy Girard), the plumply boisterous philanderer of Denys Arcand's 1986 film, "The Decline of the American Empire," is now in his early fifties and dying of cancer in a Quebec hospital. His investment-banker son, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)—a svelte, devastatingly efficient young man who disapproves of his reprobate father—shows up from London, arranges for Rémy's comfort as best he can, and reassembles the gang of gabby intellectuals who were Rémy's friends and colleagues in the earlier movie. The hospital room becomes the site of an ongoing party: sexual memories, bawdy jokes, political tirades, and regrets bang off the walls at all hours. Eventually, the entire group relocates to a house on the same lake that was the setting for "Decline"; as Rémy grapples with his failures and satisfactions, the movie shuts up and calms down. Arcand's film might be called an idyll of death, and the concluding scenes, in which Rémy tries to pass something on to the next generation, are intensely moving. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/03.) (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

SOUND
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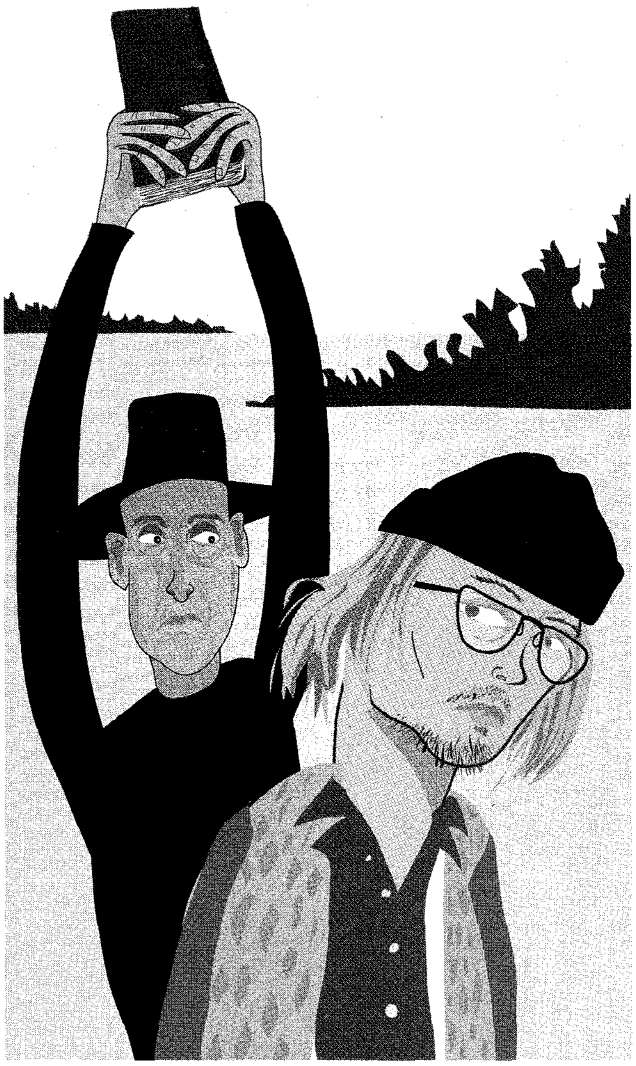
CITY OF GOD
Just how far into your face can a movie get? This one has every intention of leaving you scalded and bruised. Set in Rio de Janeiro, it was directed by Fernando Meirelles, who tries every trick known to cameramen: freeze frames, whip pans, multiple dissolves, slow motion, double motion, any kind of motion. The object is to keep pace with his characters, the young and dispossessed of the Brazilian slums. The movie hastens roughly from the nineteen-sixties to the eighties, as we watch the boys either die or grow old before their time. The result is a jolting ride, but such is the skill on show that we run the risk of being too exhilarated to notice every death; does the film convince in its plea for the forgotten poor, or are we encouraged to forget them as they fall? In Portuguese.—*Anthony Lane* (1/20/03) (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

THE COOLER
This tough and sentimental genre film feels like a B movie from 1956 with a dirty mouth. Bernie Lootz (William H. Macy) has such terrible luck that a Vegas casino owner named Shelly (Alec Baldwin) uses him as a "cooler": no sooner does Bernie join a crap game than anyone with a hot hand immediately begins to lose. But then Bernie falls in love with a young cocktail waitress, Natalie (Maria Bello), and his magic suddenly shifts: now everyone around him wins, which is big trouble for Bernie. The writer-director Wayne Kramer keeps the color scheme of this Runyonesque fable harsh and bright—the night tones of Vegas, seen from its underside. The movie is set in sordid casinos and the kind of green-walled motel room in which fornication takes place in the adjoining room at a colossal volume. The crud and the petty desperation of "The Cooler" are immensely enjoyable as atmosphere, and the actors attack their roles with relish.—*D.D.* (1/12/04) (Sutton 1 and 2 and Village East Cinemas.)



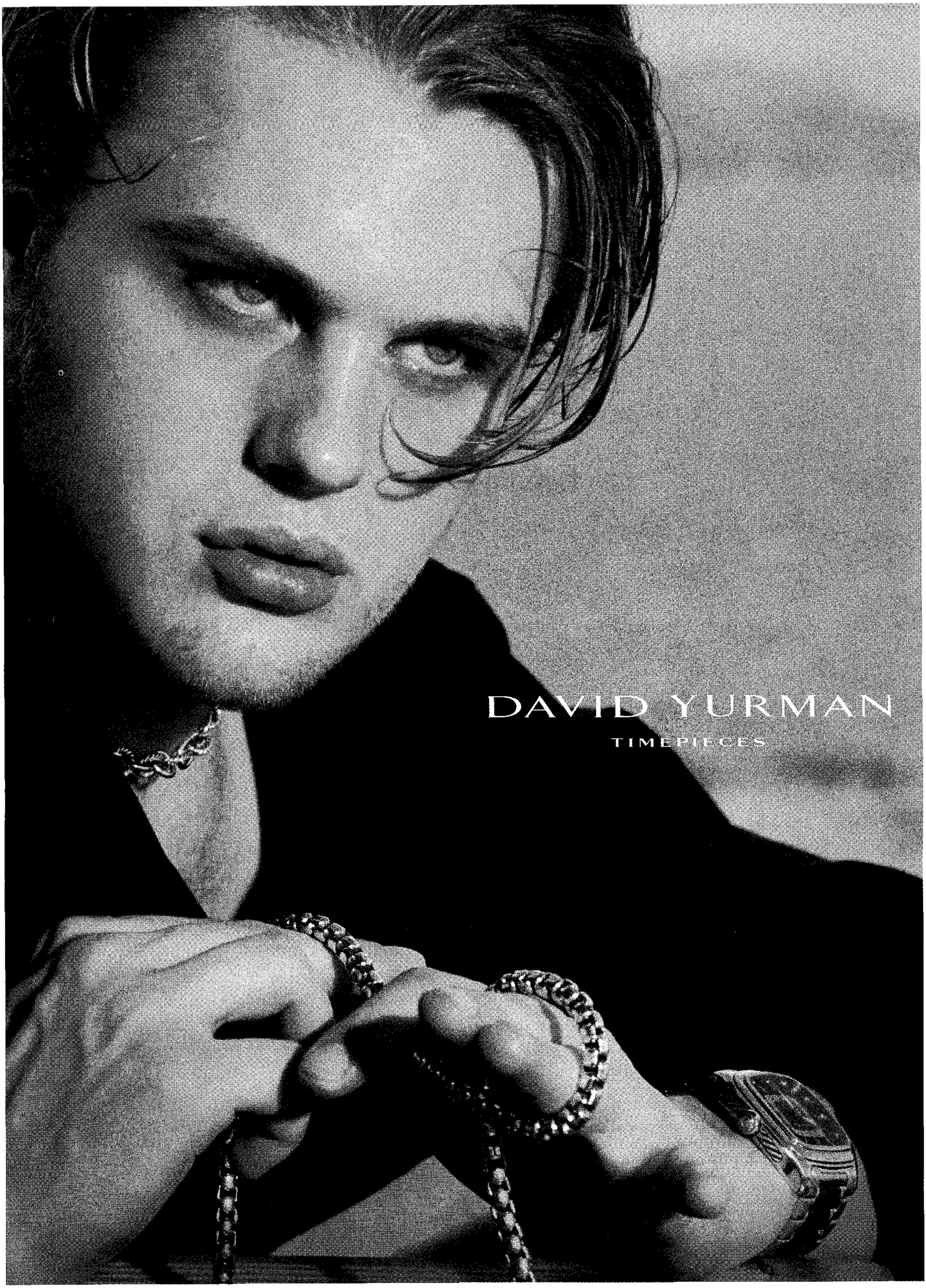
John Turturro and Johnny Depp in "Secret Window."

MAXIMILIAN BODE

THE DREAMERS
An American college student named Matthew (Michael Pitt) is in Paris in 1968 and soaking up as many movies as he can. When the government cracks down on the state-sponsored Cinémathèque Française, he gets caught up in the demonstrations and meets a red-bereted beauty named Isabelle (Eva Green) and her twin brother, Théo (Louis Garrel), who has the looks of a debauched medieval priest. The director, Bernardo Bertolucci, loves to create a hothouse. In "Last Tango in Paris," he used enclosed space to explore the limits of romantic desire, but here the conceit is a different kind of exuberance: cinephilia. Isabelle, Théo, and Matthew argue endlessly about movies and see themselves as characters playing roles. As the three embark on increasingly risqué sexual games, Bertolucci longs to re-create the moment when film, politics, and sex mutually reinforced each other as the preoccupations of youth. It's a saddening nostalgia, and the movie, despite its attempt to shock us with incest and perversities, has an air of inconsequence about it. The three aren't making a revolution in this hothouse, they're making a listless blue movie. In French and English.—*D.D.* (2/9/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, and Sunshine Cinema.)

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING
A slow, attentive movie about a painter and his model demands the kind of patience that moviegoers may feel reluctant to supply. But Peter Webber's reworking of Tracy Chevalier's novel is worth staying with: it casts a heavy spell as it unfolds the tale of Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a maid newly arrived in the house of Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). The year is 1665, and the period reconstruction, for those who are aroused by such things, is—apart from a few modern lines of dialogue—formidably detailed. The danger with such beautifying efforts is that cinema will turn into a branch of taxidermy, and what keeps Webber's movie alive is the tenseness of the setup (will this girl stay in the artist's household, and, if so, will she become his lover or his muse?) and, above all, the presence of Johansson. She is often wordless and close to plain onscreen, but wait for the ardor with which she can summon a closeup and bloom under its gaze; this is her film, not Vermeer's, all the way.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (Chelsea Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

GOOD BYE, LENIN!
Christiane (Katrin Sass), a saintly East German Communist believer, falls into a coma just before the Berlin Wall comes down, in 1989. When she awakens, her son, Alex (Daniel Brühl), a smart young man who's completely wised up about Communism but adores his mother, creates a kind of ersatz reality for her—a living museum of Communism—in which nothing has changed. He gets his cranky sister and a group of embarrassed neighbors to take part in the charade, going so far as to work with a filmmaker buddy on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MADISON AT 64TH SOUTH COAST PLAZA

Val Kilmer and Kristen Bell in "Spartan," opening March 12.

fake news broadcasts about the unending triumphs of a regime that no longer exists. This social satire, a huge hit in Germany, was written by Bernd Lichtenberg and Wolfgang Becker and directed by Becker, whose background is in German TV. The movie often plays like a series of TV-comedy skits, some of them funny and incisive, some larkish and insubstantial. Yet beneath the slapstick surface a sombre German heart beats in mournful rhythm: the point of the fable, we slowly realize, is that Communism in Germany was always an ersatz reality—that for forty years Party leaders were creating a large-scale version of the fiction that Alex creates in his mother's bedroom. In German.—*D.D.* (3/8/04) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

I'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT'S 'IS NAME

By far the liveliest portion of this tale of a dropout ad whiz (Oliver Reed) comes when he returns to the employ of a cultured egomaniac (Orson Welles) and directs a deliberately suicidal commercial that uses nuclear blasts and death-camp footage to proclaim the virtues of a Japanese Super-8 camera. Like that commercial, this 1967 movie (directed by Michael Winner and written by Peter Draper) is equally awful and clever, a glossy compendium of upper-middle-class dissatisfactions in an era of sexual loosening and guilty social consciences. Reed wants to go back to work at a small iconoclastic magazine. "I'm going to find an honest job," he tells Welles, who replies, "Silly boy. There aren't any." Welles's calm, worldly delivery makes the easy cynicism amusing. With Carol White and Marianne Faithfull, who delivers, reportedly, the first recorded "fucking bastard" in film history.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 15.)

IN AMERICA

The tale of an Irish family that travels to New York in search of a better life, or, at any rate, a life. Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger), settle near Hell's Kitchen and wrestle, as you would expect, with outlandish local customs such as air-conditioners and Halloween. Despite the title, the director, Jim Sheridan, is gripped less by the country in which his characters find themselves than by their own hope and anguish: there was a third child, a boy, who died before they came to the States. The movie has a busy intensity but lacks the rooted confidence of Sheridan's Irish work, as seen in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father." What ties it down, if anything, is the performance of Sarah Bolger—ten years old when the picture was made, but the sanest and saddest person on the block.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE

This 1989 animated feature was a huge hit for Hayao Miyazaki, but it isn't nearly as original as his previous film "My Neighbor Totoro": it tells the quaint, fantastical story of Kiki, a thirteen-year-old witch-in-training who goes to a Germanic seaside city with her black cat, Jiji, and puts out a shingle as a flying delivery girl. Along the way, she wins (and rescues) her first beau, an overenthusiastic aeronautics freak, and overcomes a case of "witch's block" with the help of a female artist friend who has experienced painter's block. Too many of the human figures (and the lessons they impart) are disappointingly banal, but Miyazaki's eye for land, city, sea, and air transcends kitsch. So does his visual sense of humor: there's some precious broomstick slapstick and some ace sidekick riffs from the randy, saturnine Jiji—particularly when he poses as a stuffed toy. In the version released in the United States, Kirsten Dunst and Phil Hartman do peerless voice work as Kiki and Jiji.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 14.)

THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

This debauched adaptation from 1988 of a Bram Stoker novel is frenetic but droll—it's exuberant about its badness. Hugh Grant applies his soft-touch savoir-faire to the role of a rural lord whose ancestor slew a legendary worm (or snake, or dragon). The writer-director, Ken Russell, seems intent on proving that boys really are made of snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails. The climax features a nubile maiden (Catherine Oxenberg) suspended over a monster-sized snake pit wearing only her pearly-white underwear as her sister (Sammi Davis) screams helplessly and the mysterious Lady Sylvia Marsh (Amanda Donohoe) approaches, adorned with a serpentlike sexual apparatus. Donohoe brings camp exultation to her work: she is the rock on which this travesty is built.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 15.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

The final act of Tolkien's saga. Many hours after Gandalf (Ian McKellen) showed up in the Shire and arranged for the transportation of a significant piece of personal jewelry, Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) staggers to the brink of Mount Doom and prepares, if he can muster the will, to cast the One Ring into the flames. By any standard, it has been an exhaustively splendid trip, crammed at once with private anxiety and lofty overviews of public strife. In this last installment, we are privileged witnesses not just to the Ringbearer's quest but also to a furious pitching of battles, as an ocean of orcs beats against the shining walls of Minas Tirith. The old gang—Legolas (Orlando Bloom), Gimli (John Rhys-Davies), and Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen)—is on hand to save the day and, by implication, the future of a civilization. The director, Peter Jackson, loyal as ever to the original book, has inherited a serious case of anticlimax; he is no more capable than Tolkien of finding a pastoral peace, at the close, that can match the energy of his war. Nevertheless, there should be enough here to dazzle the doubters; will Jackson have the nerve to remix his work, in all its majesty, and release a ten-hour marathon?—*A.L.* (1/12/04) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

As Peter and Santino, Sudanese orphans, prepare to leave their refugee camp in Kenya for a new life in the United States, a tribal elder tells them: "Don't act like those people who wear the baggy jeans, who do all the bad things in America." It's a startling and prescient statement, encapsulating both the welter of American race relations and the sense of obligation the boys will feel to the people left behind. The documentary filmmakers Megan Mylan and Jon Shenk follow the pair for a year as they adjust to a "land called Texas." Santino finds a menial job in an electronics factory, while Peter moves to Kansas City and navigates the wilds of high school. Like those of many immigrants, their experiences are bittersweet; the scene in which Peter is invited to a pizza party with Christian teen-agers is one of many surreal and heartbreaking moments.—*Michael Agger* (Village East Cinemas.)

MONSTER

To play Aileen Wuornos, the real-life prostitute and serial killer who was executed in 2002, Charlize Theron put on thirty pounds and endured an hour and a half of attention each shooting day from the makeup artist Toni G. What's remarkable about the film is not just Theron's transformation into a half-mad, beaten-up prostitute, but the disciplined performance that she gives. The actress twitches and shrugs as if her tendons were directed by will alone. She's telling the world to kiss off, yet, inevitably, she's reduced to sticking out her thumb on the highway in search of a paying customer. When a scuzzy client abuses her, she snaps, empties a revolver into his chest, and lets out a war whoop of triumph. The moment is truly frightening. Theron's ferocity pushes the material over the top, but her tenderness—the flashes of gentleness and vulnerability—retrieves it from tabloid exploitation and camp horror. With Christina Ricci as the petulant lower-middle-class girl who becomes Wuornos's lover. Written and directed by Patty Jenkins and shot in that bedraggled kingdom of chaos Central Florida.—*D.D.* (1/26/04) (Bat-

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tery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

MY ARCHITECT

A traditional quest, superbly told. Nathaniel Kahn seeks to understand the life of his father, the architect Louis I. Kahn; his task is made even more difficult by the fact that Kahn had three separate and coexisting families: a wife and two mistresses with one child apiece. For his part, Nathaniel was an illegitimate son and only eleven when his father died; his interviews are laced with raw, uncut feeling for a man he never really knew. Throughout the documentary, he uses Kahn's buildings (beautifully photographed) as a kind of wedge into his father's motivations and personality. He discovers that Kahn's more famous contemporaries, like I. M. Pei, appear haunted by his career: is it better to have designed three or four unexampled buildings, as Kahn did, or to have had a successful, high-profile architectural practice? Perhaps more surprising, the women in Kahn's life don't regret the way he treated them. Anne Tyng, Kahn's co-worker and mistress, explains her affection this way: "The ideas that you work on together connect you always somehow." In the end, Nathaniel's homage to his father demonstrates what it was like to be caught in his creative whirlwind.—*M.A.* (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MYSTIC RIVER

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later, he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neighborhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

OSAMA

The forty-one-year-old writer-director Siddiq Barmak, an Afghan film nut who never recovered from seeing "Lawrence of Arabia" as a boy, has gifts of vision and temperament equal to those of the finest directors now working. This lovely movie, the first feature to come out of Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, is about a twelve-year-old girl (Marina Golbahari) who dresses as a boy in order to get work and winds up with dozens of prepubescent boys in a madrassa, where she is subjected to nonstop Koranic recitation and bizarre lectures about sex. The movie is deeply shocking and understated, with an iconic use of such repeated imagery as the shots of men slowly keying elaborate locks that pen the women up. The groups of faceless women in their burkas are like fields of lavender swaying in the wind; the boys in their white turbans bobbing over the Koran are both beautiful and foreboding. Made for less than fifty thousand dollars (plus free use of camera and crew), the movie is an outright miracle. In Dari and Pashto.—*D.D.* (3/8/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

OTHELLO

By choosing to begin this pulsating 1952 movie with the lifting of Othello's and Desdemona's caskets—and the caging of Iago—the producer-director-adapter-star, Orson Welles, does more than declare his independence from Shakespearean custom. He plunges the audience into a world where feelings and events have an afterlife, and sets a slashing, heightened tone for the whole seat-of-the-pants production. Welles edits the text ruthlessly (the film runs ninety-one minutes), using narration to bridge gaps; the cutting brings out the primal nature of the Moor's jealousy. Welles's Othello is so caught up in his warrior's pride that he can't abide any chink in his armor. Michael MacLiammoir's dryly brilliant Iago is like an impotent stage manager. Suzanne Cloutier makes a strong and dignified Desdemona, and Fay Compton is a stirring Emilia; together, they tap the drama's feminist current. But what electrifies this "Othello" is Welles's lightning strokes of moviemaking genius. To unify a production that spread out over two continents and four years, he hit on a dynamic visual style that brings the cankers of envy and suspicion to the surface with involuted camera movements and abrupt, dizzying contrasts. (The restored print's modified soundtrack synchronizes the dubbed dialogue with the performers' lip movements—a major relief—while sacrificing some of Welles's original aural effects.)—*M.S.* (Film Forum; March 12-14.)

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

Mel Gibson's bloody re-creation of the last twelve hours in the life of Jesus is one of the cruellest movies in the history of the cinema. Gibson and the screenwriter Benedict Fitzgerald selected and enhanced incidents from the four Gospels and collated them into a single, surpassingly violent narrative in which the incomparable glories of Jesus' temperament—the joyousness, the brilliance, the heart-stopping eloquence—are all but effaced by the spectacle of his physical destruction. The lashing and flaying, often in slow-motion, go on forever, and Gibson displays a curious technical fascination with the details of crucifixion—huge nails being hammered into hands and feet, with James Caviezel's Jesus howling at each blow. Here and there, the movie has a kind of grim power, and Caleb Deschanel's even gray lighting at the Crucifixion is stunning, but this is a sickening, unilluminating, and ignorant show. The filmmakers have also changed in small ways a number of things from the Gospels and ignored what historians know of ancient Judea, all with the result of making the Jewish leaders more, and the Roman leaders less, responsible for the death of Jesus. It's a deeply angry film, and one wonders how believers can react to it with anything but guilt, fear, or loathing.—*D.D.* (3/1/04) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE RETURN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SPIRITED AWAY

The animator-director Hayao Miyazaki came out of retirement to complete this 2002 movie. It's an amazing work, filled with a visual intelligence that's meticulously composed and obscenely clever. Miyazaki's playful aesthetic is like a Japanese word that can't be adequately translated, best approximated as part Spielberg, part Dr. Seuss. American audiences may be put off at first by a film that is essentially a cartoon about a fearful ten-year-old girl. But as the hero, Chihiro, sees her parents turned into swine and flees into an alternate world filled with the creatures of Japanese mythology and of Miyazaki's own invention, any distracting sense of childishness falls away. Left to savor are virtuoso touches, like a flock of birds that becomes useless paper, a train that glides along the surface of a lake, and one of the great villains of all time, Yubaba, who looks like a bobble-headed grandmother on speed.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 13.)

STARSKY & HUTCH

The comedic teammates Owen Wilson and Ben Stiller send up one of the hallmark buddy-cop shows of the seventies. This was a fresh idea nine years ago when Spike Jonze and the Beastie Boys did it in the video for "Sabotage"; five minutes of ridiculous rooftop jumps and freeze-frame double takes are about all you need before the joke gets old. Still, Wilson and Stiller have an appealing, casual chemistry (as they did in "Zoolander"), and some of the scenes go in unexpected directions. For period detail, the 1974 Ford Torino takes center stage, but cheers to the prop master who found the vintage rubber slingshot. Directed by Todd Phillips, who can't get enough of seventies television: his next announced project is an adaptation of "The Six Million Dollar Man."—*M.A.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

TOUCHING THE VOID

Kevin Macdonald's new film is a dismaying documentary account of what happened on the side of a mountain in 1985. Two young British climbers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, ascended the west face of Siula Grande, in the Peruvian Andes, and then began their descent. Simpson slipped and injured his leg, then fell again, this time off the brink of a ridge. He was hanging from the end of a rope; at the other end, sliding fast, was Yates, who cut the rope to save himself. You come out of the movie arguing hotly—as Macdonald wants you to do—about the rights and wrongs of that dire moment, and musing on the fact that Simpson survived his ordeal. The two men tell their story with a sang-froid verging on the comical, intercut with a dramatic reconstruction of the climb itself. The cinematography, all vertiginous horror and beauty, is by Mike Eley; it leaves us with a mad inkling of what drives a mountaineer, as well as a determination to stay, at all costs, on the level.—*A.L.* (1/19/04) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

TOUCH OF EVIL

There have been three subtly different versions of Orson Welles's ornate thriller since it first came out, in 1958. The fourth should be the last: working from a memo that Welles wrote at the time, after the studio had messed with his original cut, the producer Rick Schmidlin and the editor Walter Murch have come as close to honoring the director's intentions as anyone ever will. At first glance, little has changed; the titles (and Henry Mancini's brassy theme) have disappeared from the celebrated opening shot, but from then on the basic thrust of this Mexican border tale (filmed in Venice, California) remains intact. We still have the manly Vargas (Charlton Heston) struggling to solve the case of the car bomb while his wife (Janet Leigh) feels the heat from a gang of local hoods; we are still thrown by the freakish cameos by Zsa Zsa Gabor and Mercedes McCambridge, and the horrific slaying—a kind of jazz strangulation—of the fleshly Grandi (Akim Tamiroff); and, of course, we still see Welles himself as the police chief Hank Quinlan, looming over the action like a Falstaff gone to seed. If anything, the cuts and repairs make the work more fluid and less flamboyant; it was sometimes the studio, rather than Welles himself, who liked to go over the top. His scenes with the brothel keeper Marlene Dietrich have nothing to do with the plot and everything to do with the rotting heart of this amazing fable: the apotheosis of pulp.—*A.L.* (Film Forum; March 12-14.)

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE

A boy is given a bicycle. He grows up to compete, under the tutelage of his ferocious grandmother, in the Tour de France, only to be kidnapped and smuggled overseas. The old lady, with a panting hound in tow, tracks and retrieves the unfortunate cyclist, aided by three crones who feast on a casserole of murdered frogs. Such is the gritty, fantastic plot of Sylvain Chomet's animated film, which could only have emerged from a culture in which the worship of comic books approaches the status of an organized religion. Indeed, there is much to revere in Chomet's swollen caricatures and vertiginous angles, although agnostics may be tempted to point out that a little elastic surrealism goes a long way, and that to learn the exact details of somebody else's dreams—which is what this movie feels like—can be at once haunting and tiresome. In French, just about, though most of it is noise,

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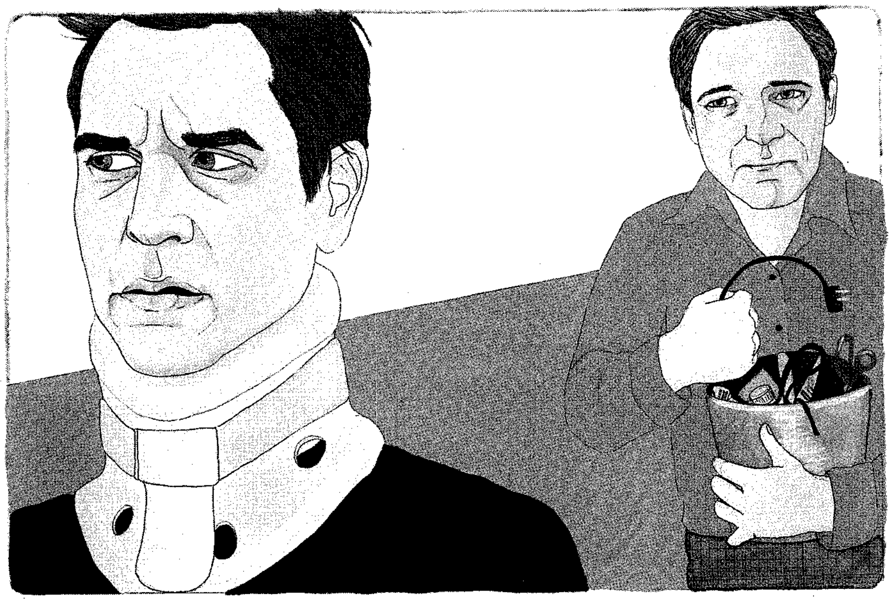
and no subtitles are required.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG
Jacques Demy's 1964 musical romance about both first love and adult love is the rare movie that fully honors both. Everyone probably remembers something about "Umbrellas": that the dialogue is sung, or that its songs became international hits (one under the title "I Will Wait for You"), or that Catherine Deneuve and Nino Castelnuovo, as a salesgirl in her widowed mother's umbrella shop and a garage mechanic who lives with his aged aunt, are a surpassingly graceful couple. The mother (Anne Vernon) is also a wonderful character, worldly wise yet not sour; and after Castelnuovo is called up for service in Algeria, the globe-trotting Parisian who courts Deneuve turns out to be a hell of a guy, just as the gal Castelnuovo catches on the rebound becomes his rock of sanity. Demy uses his exquisite camera movements to follow the flux of characters who burst with ardor. In French.—*M.S.* (Quad Cinema.)



Lone Scherfig's dark comedy, "Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself," opens March 12.

ALSO PLAYING

THE FOG OF WAR
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, and Sutton 1 and 2.

HIDALGO
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.

KITCHEN STORIES
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

MIRACLE
Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Village East Cinemas.

THE RECKONING
Angelika Film Center and Beekman.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema Classics, 332 E. 11th St. (212-677-6309).
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—World-cinema Fridays. March 12 at 7:30: "Momentos" (1981, Maria Luisa Bemberg; in Spanish). ♦ Through March 28: A Lars Von Trier retrospective. March 13 at 3:30: "Motion Picture" (1970, Jorgen Leth), plus two other Leth films and a discussion with the director. ♦ March 13-14 at 6:30: "Dogville" (2004). ♦ March 14 at 2: "Nocturne" (1980) and "Images of a Relief" (1982). ♦ March 14 at 4: "The Element of Crime" (1984).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—March 10-16: The New York Underground Film Festival. See www.nyuff.com for a complete schedule.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Anime movies. Most films are dubbed into English. March 10 at 7:15 and 9:30: "Space Firebird 2772" (1980, Taku Sugiyama and Osamu Tezuka). ♦ March 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Jin Roh: The Wolf Brigade" (1998, Hiroyuki Okiura). ♦ March 12 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Metropolis" (2001, Tarô Rin). ♦ March 13 at 3, 6, and 9: "Spirited Away" (†). ♦ March 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Kiki's Delivery Service" (†). ♦ British horror films. March 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Lair of the White Worm" (†). ♦ March 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Captain Kronos" (1972, Brian Clemens).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 15: An Orson Welles retrospective. March 10 at 1:20, 5:30, and 9:40: "Compulsion" (1959, Richard Fleischer). ♦ March 10 at 3:20 and 7:30: "The Long, Hot Summer" (1958, Martin Ritt). ♦ March 12-14 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:10: "Touch of Evil" (†). ♦ March 12-14 at 3:40 and 7:35: "Othello" (†). ♦ March 15 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Man in the Shadow" (1957, Jack Arnold). ♦ March 15 at 2:35, 6:05, and 9:35: "I'll Never Forget What's 'Is Name" (†). ♦ March 16 at 3:05 and 7:10: "A Man for All Seasons" (1966, Fred Zinnemann). ♦ March 16 at 1:15, 5:20, and 9:25: "The Sailor from Gibraltar" (1967, Tony Richardson). ♦ Through April 8: Columbia 3-D films. March 11 at 2:30, 5:30, and 8:30: "Man in the Dark" (1953, Lew Landers). ♦ March 11 at 3:55, 6:55, and 9:55: "Drums of Tahiti" (1953, William Castle).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 30: A tribute to the French studio Pathé. March 16 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Three Musketeers" (1954, André Hunnebelle; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through March 11: "Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan in Eighteen Films." March 10 at 6: "Songdelay" (1973, Joan Jonas) and "Sunday on the River" (1961, Gordon Hitchens and Ken Resnick). ♦ March 10 at 8: "A View from the Bridge" (1961, Sidney Lumet). ♦ March 11 at 4: "Anna Christie" (1930, Jacques Feyder; in German). ♦ Recent acquisitions. March 11 at 2: "The Lady Without Camelias" (1953, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). ♦ March 16 at 4: "The Man Who Wasn't There" (2001, Joel and Ethan Coen). ♦ Through March 15: "Pavel Jurácek: Czech Film Miracles of the 1960s." Unless otherwise noted, all films are in Czech and directed by Jurácek. March 11 at 6 and March 13 at 5: "The Key to Defining Dwarfs; or, The Last Travel of Lemuel Gulliver" (2002, Martin Sulík) and "Joseph Kilian/A Character Needing Support" (1963). ♦ March 11 at 8 and March 13 at 7: "Case for a Rookie Hangman" (1969). ♦ March 12 at 2 and March 13 at 3: "Every Young Man" (1966). ♦ March 12 at 4 and March 13 at 9: "The Jester's Tale" (1964). ♦ March 12 at 6 and March 13 at 1: "Voyage to the End of the Universe" (1963, Jindrich Polák). ♦ March 12 at 8 and March 15 at 6: "End of August at the Hotel Ozone" (1966, Jan Schmidt). ♦ Through March 17: The films of Ken Jacobs. March 14 at 2:30: "Nervous Ken" (2004, Henry Hills) and "Ontic Antics Starring Laurel and Hardy" (1997). ♦ March 14 at 6:30: "Local Hubble II" (2004). ♦ March 16 at 6:30: "Star Spangled to Death" (1957/2003).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. March 12-13: "Female Trouble" (1974, John Waters).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through March 21: "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 12 at 1 and 6:15 and March 14 at 9: "Nathalie" (2003, Anne Fontaine). ♦ March 12 at 3:30 and 8:45 and March 14 at 3:30: "Monsieur N." (2003, Antoine de Caunes). ♦ March 13 at 1:30 and March 16 at 4 and 9: "Hanging Offense" (2003, Guillaume Nicloux). ♦ March 13 at 3:45 and March 15 at 6: "Sansa" (2003, Siegfried). ♦ March 13 at 6 and March 15 at 1: "After You" (2003, Pierre Salvadori). ♦ March 13 at 8:45 and March 16 at 1: "A Sight for Sore Eyes" (2004, Gilles Bourdos). ♦ March 14 at 1:30: "Chouchou" (2003, Merzak Allouache). ♦ March 14 at 6:30 and March 15 at 3:45 and 8:45: "She's One of Us" (2003, Siegrid Alnoy). ♦ March 16 at 6:15: "Who Killed Bambi?" (2003, Gilles Marchand).

LARA TOMLIN

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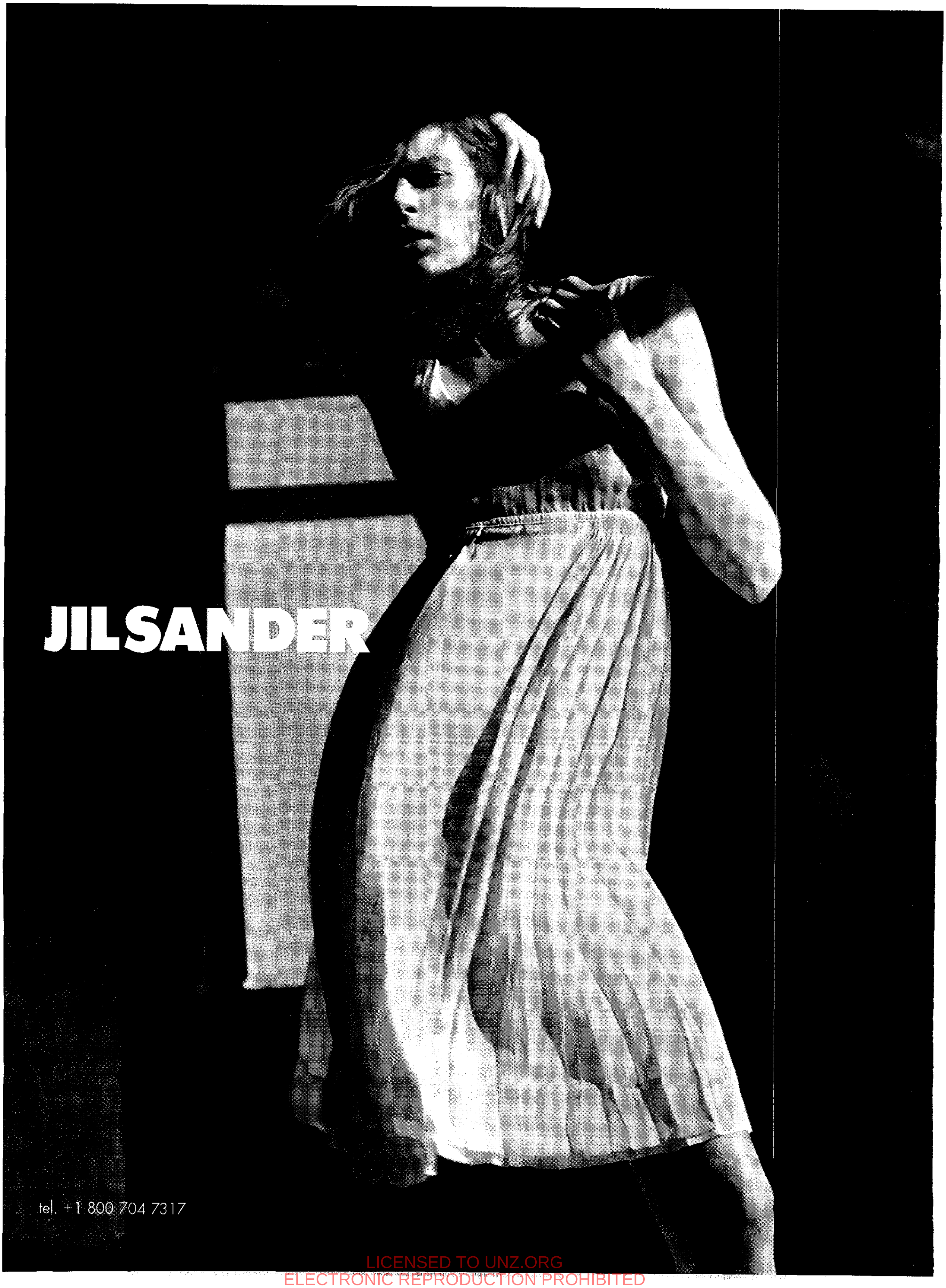
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
WEDDED BLITZ

The deliberations of the editorial board of the Baylor *Lariat* do not normally attract widespread notice beyond the environs of Waco, Texas—or within them, for that matter—but these are not normal times, and the *Lariat's* editorial the other Friday was not, in the opinion of some, a sufficiently normal editorial. After summarizing the events surrounding the current fuss over same-gender matrimony, the *Lariat* editors stated their view. "Gay couples should be granted the same equal rights to legal marriage as heterosexual couples," they wrote. "Like many heterosexual couples," they went on to conclude,

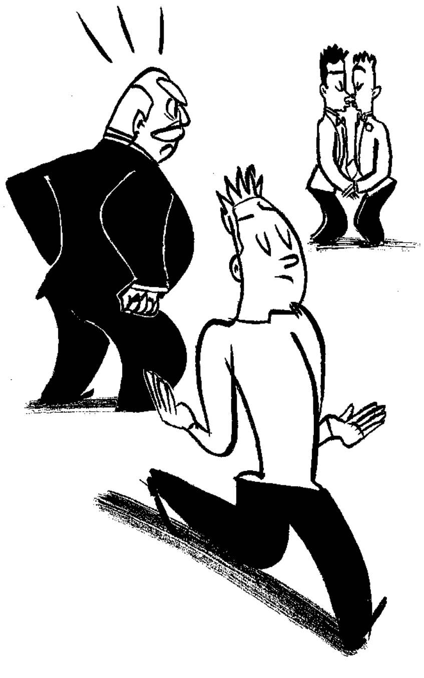
> many gay couples share deep bonds of love, some so strong they've persevered years of discrimination for their choice to co-habitate with and date one another. Just as it isn't fair to discriminate against someone for their skin color, heritage or religious beliefs, it isn't fair to discriminate against someone for their sexual orientation. Shouldn't gay couples be allowed to enjoy the benefits and happiness of marriage, too?

(This, by the way, was followed by a boldface tagline: EDITORIAL BOARD VOTE: 5–2. Wouldn't it be nice if the New York *Times*, the Washington *Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* practiced this sort of transparency?)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The Baylor *Lariat* is the campus newspaper of Baylor University. Baylor, with fourteen thousand students, describes itself as "the oldest institution of higher learning in the state and the largest Baptist university in the world," and is a bastion of Christian conservatism.

The unchristian kind, too, apparently. The president of Baylor, Robert B. Sloan, Jr., quickly lowered the boom. "Espousing in a Baylor publication a view that is so out of touch with traditional Christian teachings is not only unwelcome, it comes dangerously close to violating University policy, as published in the Student Handbook, prohibiting the advocacy of any understandings of sexuality that are contrary to biblical teaching," President Sloan stated, adding darkly, "The Student Publications Board will be addressing this matter with the *Lariat* staff as soon as possible." Sure enough, that same day, the Student Publications Board—which evidently functions in the Baylor context the way the Ideology Department of the Communist Party used to function in the Soviet context—announced that the *Lariat* had indeed violated "policy" and assured the world that "the guidelines have been reviewed with the *Lariat* staff, so that they will be able to avoid this error in the future."



It was no great surprise that the *Lariat's* foray into dissidence was promptly squelched. What was startling was that such a foray, in such a place, was ventured at all. It was more startling, in its way, than the pro-gay-marriage ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, three weeks earlier. Waco, after all, is far from Boston. And the vote in the Supreme Judicial Court was narrower—4–3, not 5–2.

The *Lariat* fracas is a small part of a large drama, but it is emblematic of an essential feature of the gay-marriage debate: the most salient divisions are not religious, political, or "cultural" but generational. To talk to younger people is to realize that for most of them, including many young conservatives, such notions as the idea that homosexuality is shameful, that it is a voluntary and/or contagious "life-style choice," or that it is some sort of threat to something or other (public order, the family, civilization, God) are simply bizarre curios from the past, like the belief that masturbation causes blindness. And, for what it's worth, anecdotal impressions are confirmed by opinion research. One particularly striking CBS News/New York *Times* poll, taken last year, asked respondents if they would favor or oppose "a law that would allow homosexual couples to marry, giving them the same legal rights as other married couples." Among adults under age thirty, 61 per cent said they would favor such a law and 35 per cent said they would oppose it; among sixty-five-year-olds and up, 18 per cent were in favor and 73 per cent opposed. The numbers vary from poll to poll, but the huge age gap is always there.

The trend lines are clear: at some point in the fairly near future—maybe by the time those twenty-somethings are forty-somethings—gay marriage will be routine. (So will gay divorce, if the experience of straight marriage is any guide.) As for the legal status of homosexual unions, we are smack in the middle of a period of creative chaos. Family law has always been messy in this country, with marriages that are lawful in one state being unlawful in the next. Now it's just messier. Some legislatures are passing laws forbidding gay marriage, others are experimenting with civil unions, still others are doing both; mayors, in acts of what might be called civic disobedience, are presiding at gay weddings; courts are issuing dicta for every taste. Last week, it was the turn of New York State's crackerjack attorney general, Eliot Spitzer, who threaded the needle deftly by announcing that while it remains illegal for gays to get married in New York, gay marriages performed legally elsewhere are legal here, too.

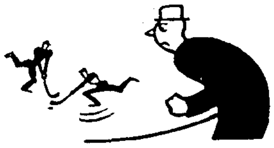
There is ferment aplenty. But none of it exceeds the tolerances of America's ramshackle federal mechanism. When divisions are rampant, passions on all sides are high, and no one on any side is suffering any palpable harm, the natural—and not necessarily reprehensible—inclination of politicians is to straddle. That is what Senator Kerry has been doing, and until recently it was what President Bush had been doing, too. But then the President's poll numbers dropped, and his religious-right base—unsatiated, apparently, by the Administration's record of crippling stem-cell research, packing the courts with troglodytes, funding "faith-based" services, and defunding family planning—grew restive.

The best that can be said for Bush's sudden call for a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage is that, on some level, he seems ashamed of it. He went to the Roosevelt Room, delivered his prepared statement, and left without taking questions. The *Times* reported that "White House officials" thought that the President appeared uncomfortable. Vice-President Cheney, whose beloved daughter is openly gay, said stoically a few days later that he will support his President, but he could not quite bring himself to say that he thinks the amendment itself is a good idea.

It is close to a certainty that no such amendment will be adopted. There simply aren't enough people who see gay marriage as a sufficiently dire threat to "the welfare of children," "the stability of society," and "the most fundamental institution of civilization" (the President's words) so that writing bigotry into the Constitution itself is urgently required. Bush probably doesn't believe that, and Cheney certainly doesn't. They're just trying to win an election, and they figure that the end justifies the means. We'll learn in November whether their ploy was successful. Either way, the question posed in all sweet innocence by the student editors of the Baylor *Lariat* will remain: Shouldn't gay couples be allowed to enjoy the benefits and happiness of marriage, too?

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

FIRST PERIOD SLUMP



Hockey is a roughneck pastime from the Canadian prairie that was persuaded to leave the windswept town it was raised in, among miners and farmers and nuns who rapped its knuckles with rulers, and move to the city and try and hold down a job. Perhaps staring out a window at the lights of Moose Jaw, Hockey envisioned a place for itself among glamorous people and the stirring, chaotic exchanges of metropolitan life—it was, after all, as the sign at the old Madison Square Garden used to say, "The World's Fastest Game."

The city turned out to be only intermittently hospitable to the bumptious immigrant. Hockey now feels morose and forlorn, overlooked at the party. Late at night, Hockey walks down Broadway in the rain. Hockey has dined alone. Hockey has drunk too much. Pausing before the window of a fashionable restaurant, Hockey stares balefully at Major League Baseball, sharing champagne with models. Hockey dials the number of a girl it used to know and gets her machine. "Candace, if you're there, pick up," Hockey says. "It's Hockey." Candace waits for Hockey to finish, then erases the message. A cab approaches. Hockey raises its hand. The taxi passes. The driver stops at the end of the block for Pro Bowling, out clubbing with Monster Trucks and the Ice Capades. In the morning, Hockey stares at its lathered face in the mirror and thinks, I've had enough. I hate my job. I just want to go back to my cabin, do some ice fishing, maybe get a dog.

It's a deplorable period for hockey, actually. A lockout is threatened for next season by all those testy owners who desire a guaranteed return on their investment, which, of course, is no more than any sensible person would wish for his money. Hockey has too many franchises, thirty altogether, the majority of them colorless, plodding, and obstinate teams that play not to lose. Moreover, there is the perception that the sport prefers that its talented players be subject to rules that favor less accomplished players, in order to level the field and protect the portfolios of businessmen who thought it was a shrewd idea to put franchises in Phoenix and Nashville and Raleigh-Durham.

Manhattan's only practicing iconic sports hero is a hockey player, Mark Messier, the captain of the New York Rangers. Mark Messier. It's a fun name to say. Not exactly Lolita, no "trip of three steps down the palate," but easier, at least, to say in a big arena: Mark *Mess*-ee-yay! At forty-three, Messier is near, and perhaps at, the end of his career. His team is in a terrible slide—it will miss the playoffs for a seventh straight time, a club record. His closest friend on the Rangers, the superlative defenseman Brian Leetch, was

Is this the little black dress of furniture?

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traded last week. A few days before that, Leetch, in a black shirt and bluejeans, was standing by a table in a lounge at the Rangers' practice facility in Tarrytown. On the table were about fifty pucks in stacks like poker chips. He was talking with an acquaintance and using a silver Sharpie pen to sign each puck for a charity. A half hour earlier, he and the other Rangers, without Messier, had been on the ice, running drills. Leetch's manner is reserved, but he seemed on the ice especially subdued. He looked like someone whose feelings had been hurt and who was too proud to talk about it. The burden of missing the playoffs, year upon year, has worn on him and his teammates, and on no one more than Messier.

Messier was in a part of the facility that is open only to the team. The acquaintance asked Leetch if he might persuade Messier to join them. Leetch was gone for some time. Eventually, he came back and said that Messier had agreed to appear.

Messier is the size of a heavyweight boxer, and his presence is imposing. When he came though the door, though, it seemed as if his shoulders were sagging. He moved like a man who had just risen from a sickbed. He was wearing a gray T-shirt and jeans and delicate metal-framed glasses. He stood with his feet spread slightly, and when he spoke the tone of his voice was flat, as if he were a cop explaining why the circumstances require that he give you a ticket. When he was asked about the hockey season, he simply shook his head. "I don't want to talk about hockey," he said. "I have nothing to say." His bearing was such that no one else said anything, either.

—*Alec Wilkinson*

SECOND PERIOD
RINK RAT IN CHIEF?

John Kerry's prep-school alma mater, St. Paul's, is sometimes known as "the cradle of American hockey." There, in Concord, New Hampshire, on the black ice of the Lower School Pond, boys from the school's three intramural clubs—Old Hundred, Delphian, and Isthmian—gathered to play shinny as far back as Reconstruction. One legend holds that the first-ever organized hockey game—south of the border, that is—took place at St. Paul's, in 1883. Well into the twentieth century, the school continued to groom the ice on the pond—eight, maybe ten rinks' worth—using a sort of horse-drawn Zamboni.

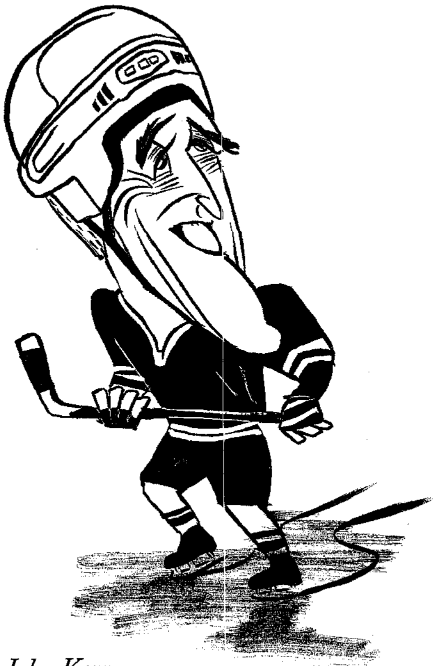
Senator Kerry, for those not paying close attention, has been lugging his bag of sweaty gear—skates, garter belt, mouth guard—around the country, making pit stops at ice rinks along the way; he is the first hockey-playing Presidential candidate since Eugene McCarthy. As a senior at St. Paul's, in the winter of 1961-62, Kerry played on the varsity team. The captain and best player was a guy named Bobby Mueller, who is now better known as Robert S. Mueller III, the director of the F.B.I. Another senior on the team was John (Scuffy) Whitman ("Scuffy because he had the world's most highly polished shoes," a teammate says). Whitman married Christie Todd, who became the governor of New Jersey.

"That was the worst team in the history of St. Paul's hockey—ever," Dr. Stan Resor said last week. "We tied tiny Hebron Academy, and that was it. We lost all the rest." Resor, whose father was Stanley Resor, the Vietnam-era Secretary of the Army, and who is now a neurology professor at Columbia, played defense. A glance at the old yearbook—the player names (Chubb, Pierpont, Whitney) suggest a rather rarefied squad—confirms Resor's recollection: shut out by Exeter and Andover; smoked 10–1 by the Harvard J.V. team, and 8–0 by Yale's freshmen; beat 10–0 by the Swiss Junior National Team. ("It became quickly obvious that the scheduler had made a mistake," Resor remembers of the Swiss game. "I think they thought we were a college.")

Forty-two years is a long time, and there is some confusion over the specifics. More than one person has recalled, if wishfully, that Kerry was a right wing while Mueller flanked the left. But in recent conversations and e-mails with several of Kerry's teammates a more or less consistent portrait of the nominee as a young hockey player has emerged.

"I was a goalie, so I got to watch the guys skate around a lot," John Rousmaniere, who is now an author of nautical books, said. "Kerry had very long strides. He was not a digger."

"Kerry was one of the best stickhandlers on the team and welcomed the opportunity to exhibit his skills," John Cocroft, a machine operator at a soapworks, recalled. "Impatient cries of 'Shoot' or 'Pass it' followed him whenever he got the puck, at which point he would execute one more rink turn and a heads-up dribble, looking for a better opportunity to make his play."



John Kerry

"He was tall, rangy, like some sort of big eagle—kind of swoopy," Haven Pell, a financial adviser in Washington, said.

As Kerry has aged, so has his style of play. The comedian Denis Leary has skated with Kerry about ten times over the past few years. Leary describes Kerry as "kind of a Phil Esposito type of player," referring to the old Boston Bruins star, who was famous for scoring so-called garbage goals. "Kerry's kind of tough to move out of the front of the net, and he's king of the rebounds," Leary said. "He's not big on back-checking."

Leary played in a game organized by the Kerry campaign shortly before the New Hampshire primary, in which Kerry scored two soft goals but failed, in numerous attempts, to complete the hat trick. "He took a lot of crap in the locker room," Leary said. "He must have had six opportunities where he was wide open and he couldn't put it away."

Regardless, Kerry's hobby raises the possibility of a new voting bloc—rink rats—to complement soccer moms and

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NASCAR dads. "My core issue now is: you could have a hockey fan in the White House," Leary said. "How great would it be to turn on the television and see some people skating on an outdoor rink on the South Lawn? I'd be there. I'd help shovel, too." The bad news for Democrats? Hockey is not a red-state sport. And Canadians can't vote.

—Ben McGrath

THIRD PERIOD PUCK FLICK

Few things rate higher on the dork meter than going to see "Miracle" with a hockey stick in your hands. "Miracle," of course, is the new movie about the United States hockey team's upset of the Soviets at the 1980 Winter Olympic Games, in Lake Placid. Though it may be routine, at a movie like this, to get choked up or even to cheer, it is not advisable to show up wearing or carrying hockey equipment of any kind. One man who tried this the other night, at a theatre on East Eighty-sixth Street—he couldn't help stickhandling kernels of spilled popcorn in the aisle—attracted a range of withering, befuddled glances. For his wife, the embarrassment abated only when the show began. "This is a date?" she whispered.

A few weeks ago, Igor Larionov, the New Jersey Devil and former Soviet star, who has been called the Russian Gretzky, decided that he needed to see the film. He went to a multiplex near his house, in Short Hills, with his wife and his young son, but they wanted to see something else. "So I went by myself," Larionov said the other day, in the Devils' locker room after practice. "I think I was the last guy to come into the theatre. The place was full. It was already dark." Nobody in the theatre seemed to recognize him, in part because he is just a hockey player, and also because he hardly looks like a professional athlete: he is short and compact, with a thoughtful, boyish expression that, along with a proficiency at chess and an occasional quoting of Pushkin and the wire-rimmed glasses that he wears away from the rink, has earned him another nickname—the Professor. He was among the first Russians to come to play in the National Hockey League, fourteen years ago. Now, at forty-three, he's the oldest player in the N.H.L.

In 1980, Larionov was a little too green to play on the Soviet team at Lake Placid, but he remembers the occasion well. "The guys who didn't make the national team, we were in Kiev at a tournament, to try to stay busy," he said. "I found out in the morning. I was shocked. Somebody said, at breakfast, 'The Russians lost last night.' I guess the Voice of America said it. I thought, There's no chance anybody could beat that team. I decided, I'm not gonna believe it until I watch the game at seven o'clock. They showed the game on tape delay, because people were going to work during the day. You were not supposed to know the result. So that night I started watching. With five or seven minutes left to go, I started to believe: they're losing the game. It was, like, a war, and all of a sudden we lost a battle—a crucial battle of the war."

Larionov crossed the locker room to change the channel on a TV set above the door, from ESPN to CNBC, in order to check on his stocks.

"It's been every fucking single day, you guys talking about that game," he went on. Before coming to New Jersey, last summer, Larionov spent eight years on the Red Wings, in Detroit, where his teammates called him Iggy. (N.H.L. nicknames are governed by an esoteric set of rules, one being that the long "e" sound is removed from names that have it, and added to those that do not. Thus, Gretzky is Gretz, and Clarke is Clarkie.) Several times a year, the Lake Placid game was rebroadcast on cable. Without fail, a teammate, Brendan Shanahan, would come in the next day and call out, "Iggy, you watch the game last night?"

"Who was playing?" Larionov would ask.

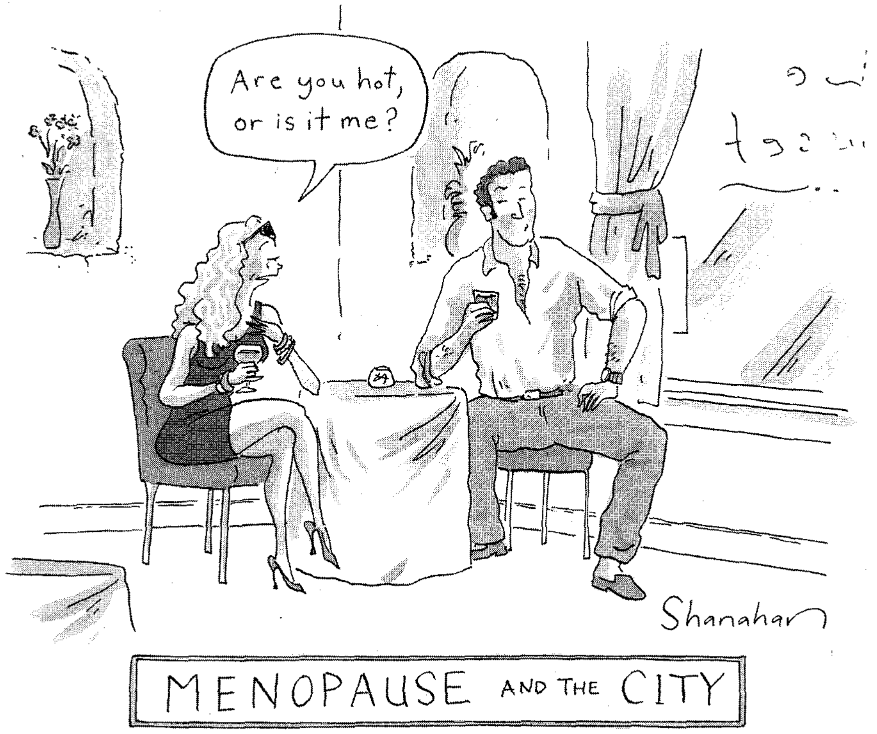
"U.S.A.-Russia! It was a miracle!"

"Jesus, Shanny, I wasn't there, so don't ask me."

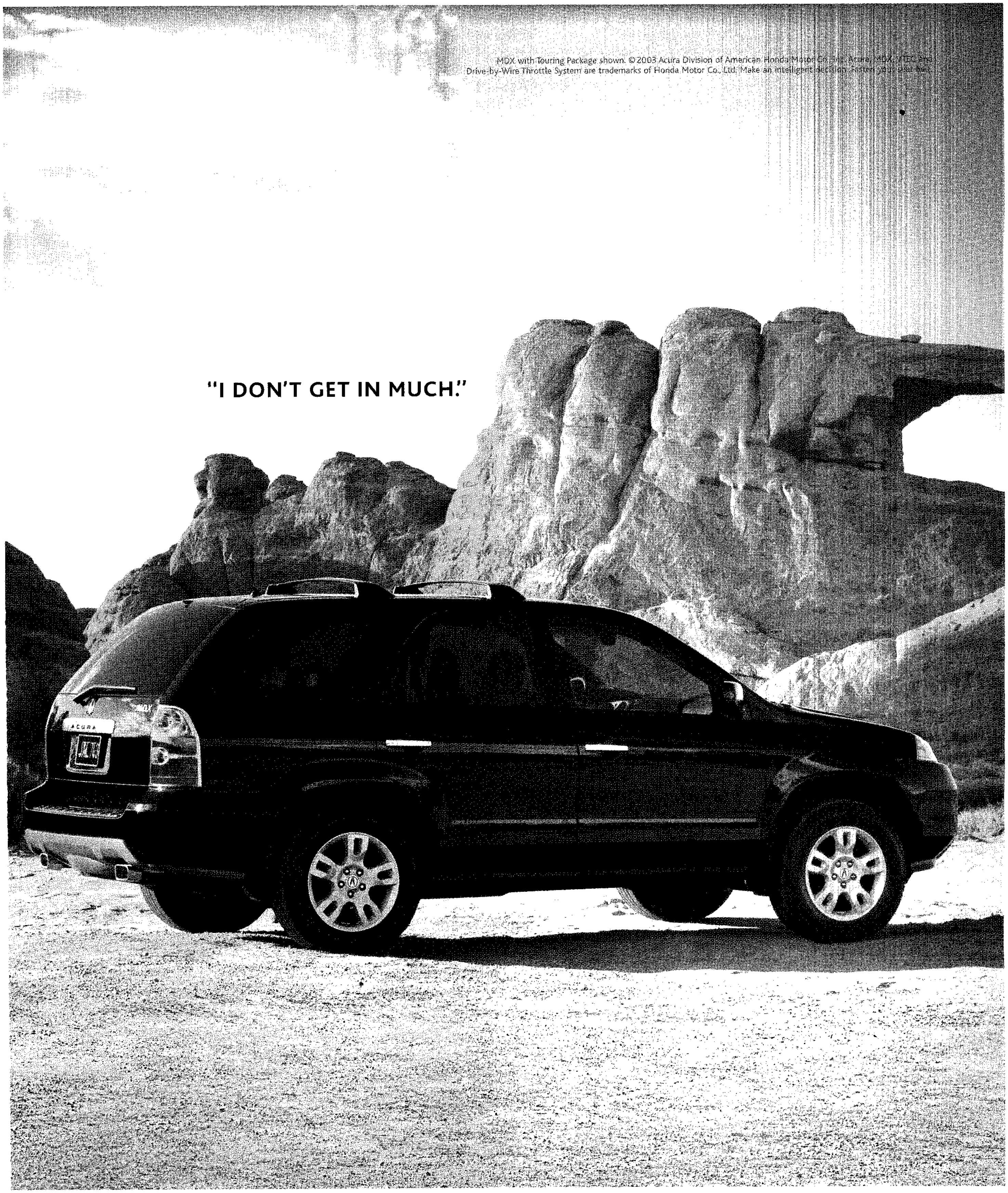
At the multiplex, Larionov said, he had sat quietly, admiring the approach, as it was depicted in "Miracle," of the American coach, Herb Brooks. He heard Brooks use the old Russian expression "The legs feed the wolf" and saw his compatriots depicted, as usual, as talented but humorless automatons. He was caught up in the movie, riding the emotion. He liked the story.

"At the end of the movie, there was a standing ovation in the theatre," Larionov said. "I just left. To be honest, I felt like I'd lost. My friends played there—Krutov, Makarov, Fetisov, Kasatonov. I wish the guys in Hollywood had spent more time, maybe even just five minutes, to show the Russian side of the story. They should have showed a little bit of what happened inside the Soviet camp. But I know American movies are always like that."

—Nick Paumgarten


Are you hot, or is it me?
Shanahan

MENOPAUSE AND THE CITY



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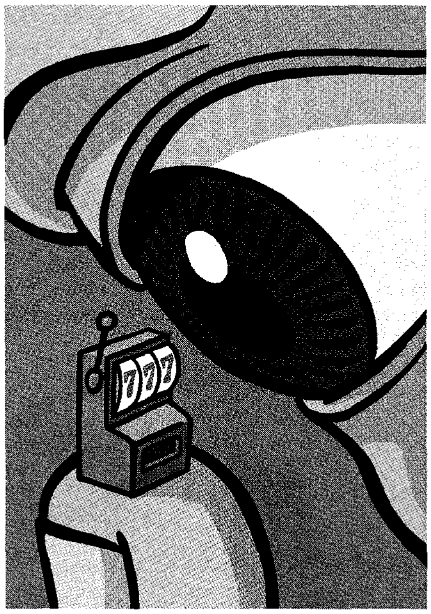
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
BRING ON THE NANOBUBBLE

In the early sixties, investors stumbled on a neat trick: if a company had "tron" or "tronics" in its name, its stock was a hit. This was the dawn of the computer age, and a host of businesses straight out of "The Jetsons"—Astron, Transitron, Videotronics—became the darlings of Wall Street. The boom ended badly, as booms so often do. In 1962, the stock market plunged, and the trons and tronics were knocked flat, most of them for good. But investors have short memories. At the end of the decade, they fell for tech stocks again (the magic word this time around was "Silicon"). Later, it was P.C.s, then biotech, and, more recently, dot-coms. Infatuation and disillusionment: it's the American way.

Now investors have found a new crush: nanotechnology. Nanotech involves designing, manipulating, and building things at atomic and molecular levels—tinkering with the building blocks of matter. Most applications for it are years or even decades away, but Wall Street has caught on to it, and in the past year companies with any sort of nano connection—Nanometrics, Nanogen, Nanopierce, Nanoproprietary—have seen their stocks rise sharply. This boom is in its early days, since most nanotech companies are still tiny and privately held. But the scent of untold riches is already in the air. Josh Wolfe, who started the first nanotech venture-capital firm, compares it to the Internet circa 1993, before Netscape went public. He thinks the first big nanotech I.P.O. could happen in the next year.

The idea for nanotech can be traced back to a lecture delivered, in 1959, by the future Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, who argued that there was no reason, theoretically, that humans couldn't move and control atoms. It took researchers thirty years to prove him right—in 1989, I.B.M. scientists arranged atoms in the shape of the company logo—and only in the past few years have real nanotech businesses emerged. So far, nanotech has been used to make pants that won't stain, tiles that won't chip, and windows that won't get dirty. I.B.M. has used it to increase twentyfold the amount of data that can be stored on computer hard drives. In the near future, nanotech will help us produce cheaper solar cells, cheaper and more reliable flat-screen televisions, and an entirely new form of semiconductor. But we're also told that soldiers will eventually wear light, flexible nanotech armor that is bulletproof and able to repel chemical and biological agents. Most dramatically, many scientists think that nanotechnology will transform the way drugs are made and delivered; there's also a chance that it will become central to the fight against cancer, allowing doctors to target and kill individual cancer cells while leaving healthy cells alone.

The very fact that nanotech is so bewilderingly broad in its potential applications—from window-cleaning to chemotherapy—is what explains the hype, of course. Nanotech is what economists call a "general-purpose technology," along with rail travel, electricity, and the Internet; it may end up revolutionizing a wide range of industries, instead of just one or two. A well-regarded company called Nanosys, for instance, is currently collaborating with DuPont, Intel, and Matsushita, among others. That's where the untold riches come in.

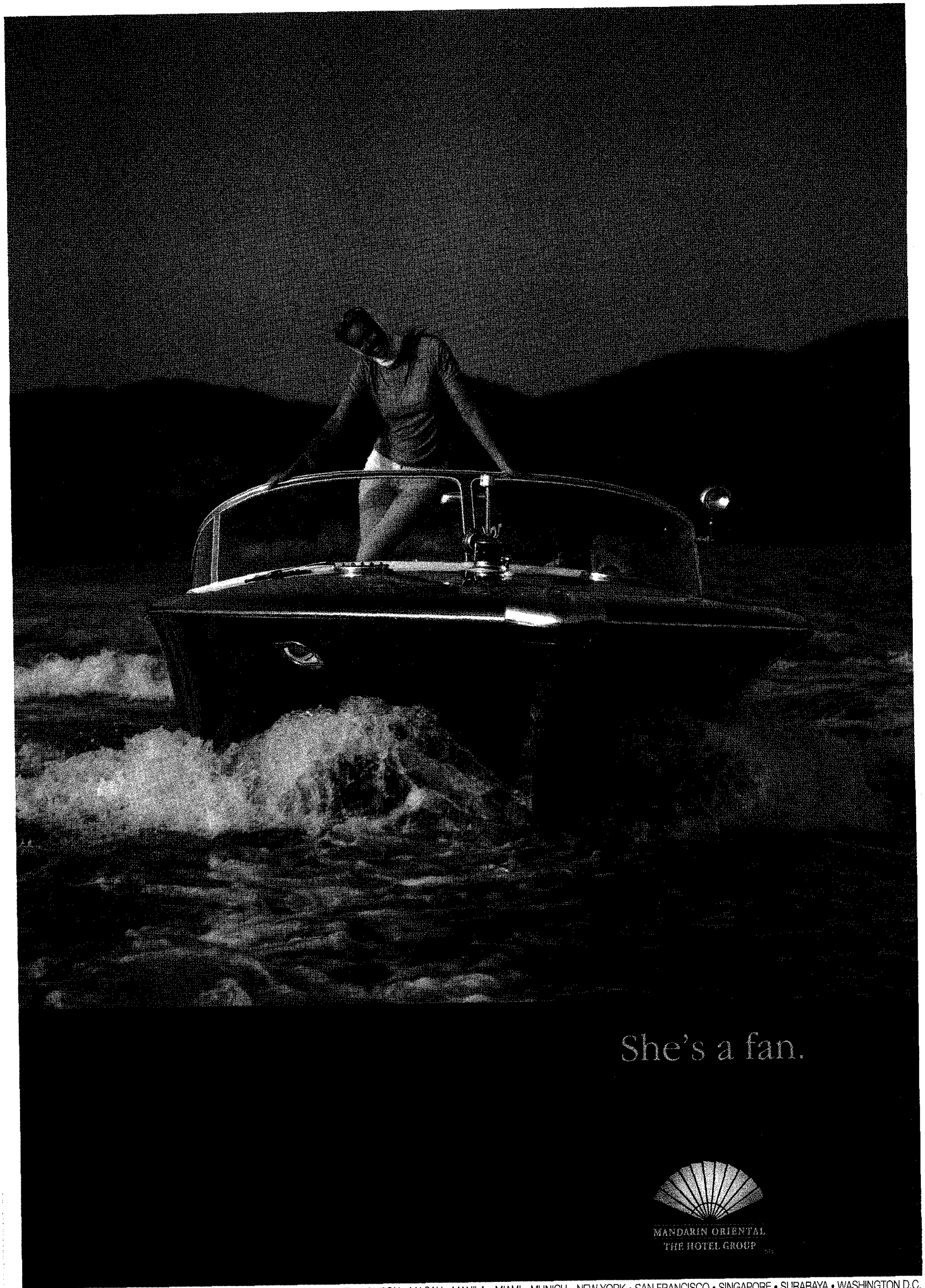


Even if nanotech does live up to its promise, though, almost all the nanotech companies that are now so hot on Wall Street, not to mention those still dreaming of blockbuster I.P.O.s, will be gone in a decade. That's how new industries get built in America: a horde of companies rise up, the weak or misguided fall away, and a few good ones thrive. With a general-purpose technology like nanotech or the Internet, the process is even bloodier; because you can do so many things with the technology, you pursue a lot more fruitless notions and reckless schemes before you figure out what really works.

The price of innovation is that you spend money on bad ideas as well as on good ones. Some of the money comes from venture capitalists, who factor the inevitable mistakes into their investments. And some of it comes from government (Washington is spending $3.7 billion on nanotech research over the next four years). But a good chunk comes from all those money managers and retail investors who believe that they will be getting in on the next Xerox, the next Amgen, the next Microsoft. Most of them won't, of course; in fact, most of them will end up losing money (which is why there's already been a great deal of finger-wagging over investor interest in nanotech). The paradox is that their losses are often society's gain. Thanks to investors' willingness to take a flyer on things like nanotech, companies are able to do more research and development than is economically rational; they experiment with ideas and approaches that, under leaner conditions, would never be tried. It's a messy process, but it's the best one we've found for inspiring real innovation.

That doesn't mean that all investor manias are healthy: no one benefitted when Wall Street thought bowling was going to take over America, for instance. But when it comes to transformative technologies, overoptimistic investors are actually working for the common good—even if they don't know it. We can be glad that investors financed the construction of thousands of miles of track in the middle of the nineteenth century, despite the fact that most of them dropped a bundle doing it. The same goes for overoptimistic investors who poured money into semiconductors thirty years ago, financed undersea fibre-optic cables in the late nineties, and now are poised to lose their shirts in the coming nanobubble. In the dreams of avarice lie the hopes of progress.

—*James Surowiecki*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LETTER FROM MIAMI

THE CUBAN STRATEGY

Can Jeb Bush deliver the Florida vote in November?

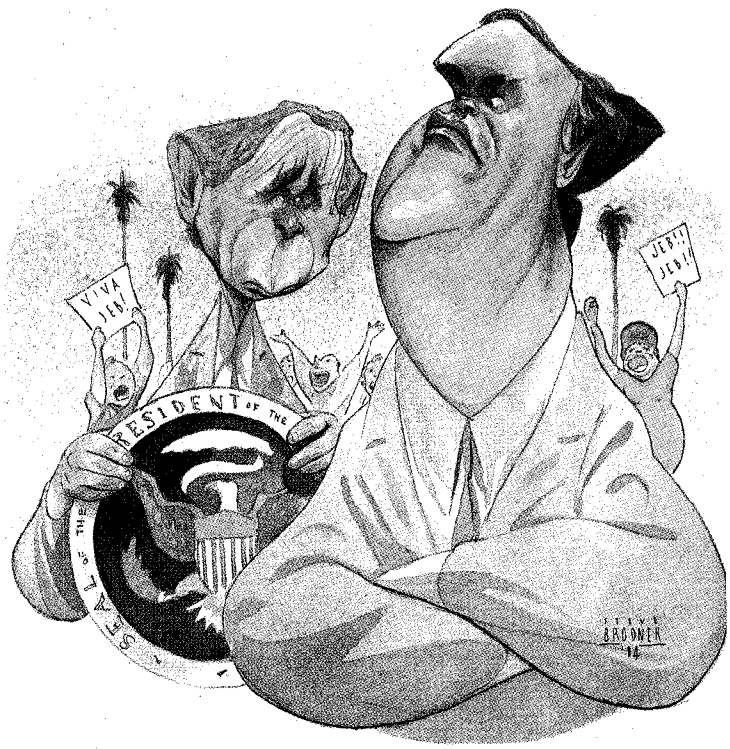
BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

Last summer, out in the sunlit seas of the Florida Straits, the United States Coast Guard came upon a green 1951 Chevrolet flatbed truck motoring north from Cuba. The vehicle was being kept afloat by pontoons made from fifty-five-gallon drums; there was a propeller attached to its driveshaft. With twelve people aboard, the truck had already made it more than halfway to the United States—it was only forty miles south of Key West when it was intercepted. The Coast Guard took the passengers into custody, then machine-gunned the truck until it sank. A few days later, the refugees were dumped on a beach back in Cuba.

Refugee interdictions are an everyday story in the waters off Florida, and Cuban *balseros* have tried to make the crossing on all kinds of unlikely craft, including a surfboard and a refrigerator. But there was something about the Chevy that caught the imagination of South Florida's large Cuban-exile community. Local Spanish-language radio started playing a salsa tune about the incident, which became a hit. "I want to go to Yuma no matter what / With my Chevy I will get there no matter what." (*La Yuma* is Cuban slang for the United States—the term comes from a 1957 Western, "3:10 to Yuma," starring Glenn Ford, which enjoyed an unnaturally long run on the island.) But the song was also pointedly political. "George Bush has become a rat," the singer declared. And: "Oh, how the Republican treason hurts!"

These lyrics presumably alarmed the White House. Karl Rove, the Bush Administration's chief political strategist, recently described Florida as "ground zero" for the 2004 Presidential election—the state that must be won, much as it was in 2000. And Cuban-Americans, who voted overwhelmingly for Bush last time, remain indispensable to a Republican victory. (When Bill Clinton took more than thirty per cent of the Cuban vote, in 1996, he won Florida.) There are some eight hundred and fifty thousand Cubans in Florida, more than half of them registered to vote—not such a large number in a state of seventeen million, except that when they turn out in force and vote en masse they are huge. In 2000, Cubans were estimated to have given Bush two hundred and fifty thousand more votes than they gave Al Gore—in an election decided by five hundred and thirty-seven votes. Cuban protesters, moreover, played a pivotal role in shutting down the vote recount in Miami-Dade County, intimidating the local officials in charge.

A new kind of anger has been growing among the exiles, though. They have been disappointed that Bush has failed to take a harder line against Fidel Castro than Bill Clinton did, or to extend a warmer welcome to Cuban refugees. Many exiles were also unhappy with all the effort spent on overthrowing Saddam Hussein while a tyrant whom they find more intolerable has been left in peace. (Last week, a Univision poll showed that more than one-third of Latino voters in South Florida—most of them Cubans—disapproved of the job the President has done "promoting democracy and regime change" in Cuba.)

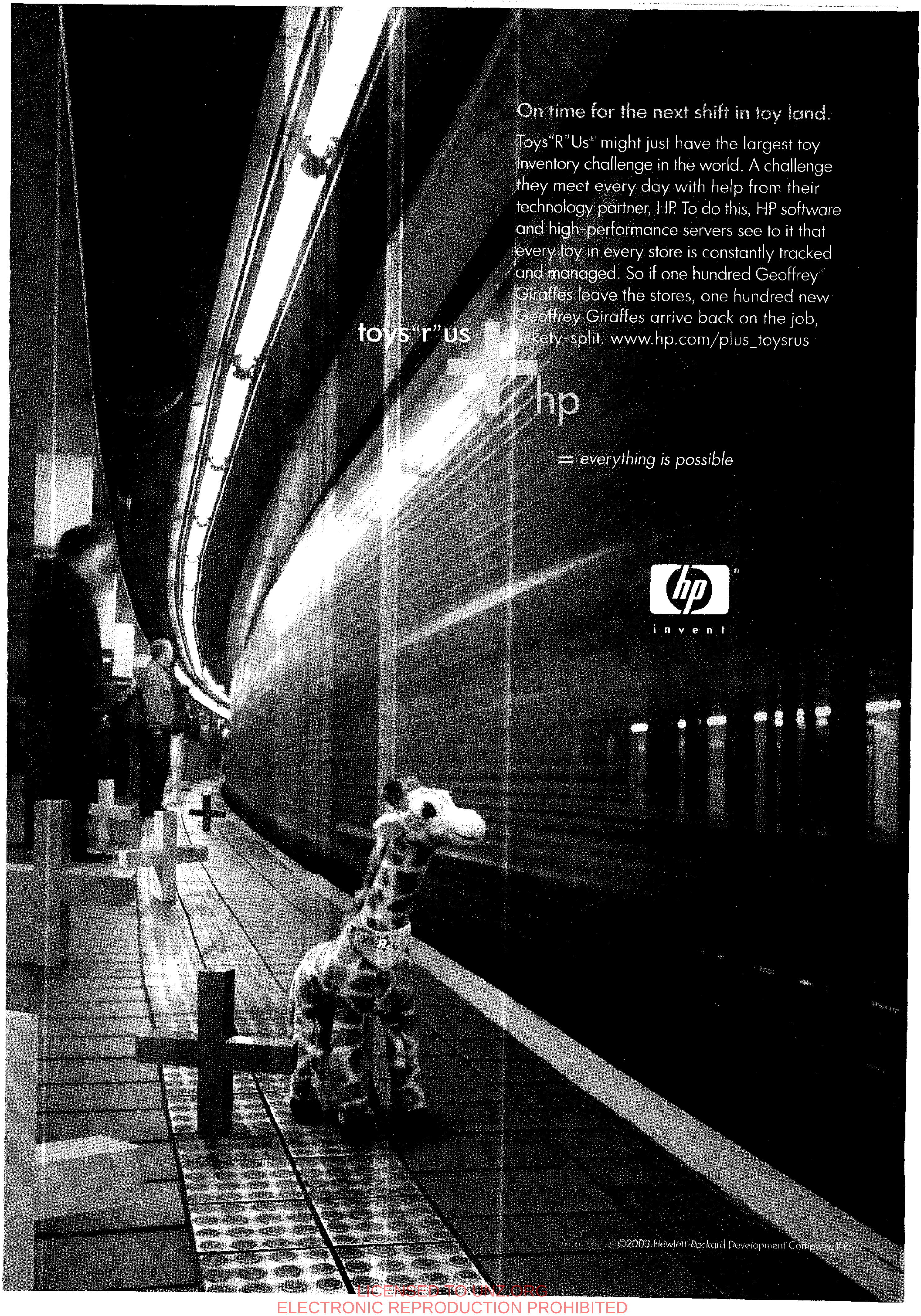


Many Cuban exiles see Jeb as their best connection to the White House.

STEVE BRODNER

The seagoing Chevy wasn't the only incident that caused the exiles' resentment to boil over last summer. There was also the interception of a Cuban boat that twelve would-be refugees had hijacked. The hijackers were handed over to the Cuban authorities after negotiations to insure that none of them would be executed. Several were given long prison sentences instead. Thirteen Republican state legislators from South Florida, ten of them Cuban-American, wrote a letter of protest to the White House. Even Jeb Bush, Florida's governor—and the President's younger brother—criticized the repatriation as "just not right."

Jeb Bush was in a tough spot. The White House is counting on him, of course, to deliver Florida for the Republicans in November. If the Democrats can repeat their 2000 victories in Pennsylvania and Michigan, Florida's Electoral College votes (now twenty-seven, up from twenty-five) may in fact determine once again who wins the election. Although both of Florida's senators are Democrats and the state was once a Democratic stronghold, it now has nearly as many registered Republicans. There are large groups of non-Cuban Latino voters in Florida—Do-



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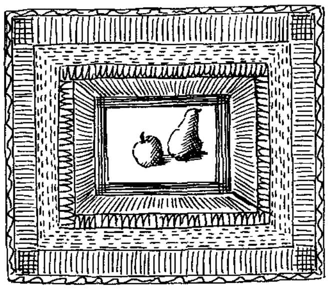
minicans, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, and, most numerously, Puerto Ricans, many of whom live around Orlando, where thousands work at Disney World. Most of these voters are Democrats, but Jeb Bush and his family, particularly his Mexican-born wife, Columba, and their telegenic son, George P., are extremely popular, inspiring a great deal of cross-party voting. Still, many Florida Democrats—especially African-Americans, who were disproportionately, and often unfairly, disqualified in a sweep of supposed felons from the rolls in 2000—remain incensed about the election, and will be strongly motivated to go to the polls this year. The vote should be close again. And Cuban-American turnout—how much the Cubans care about keeping George W. Bush in office—could be decisive.

The Cuban exiles are not, however, just another constituency for Jeb Bush. Their pathos, their myopia, and his surprisingly deep involvement in their affairs—not to mention his own Presidential ambitions—make for an unusually delicate, powerful alliance. Many exiles see him, rightly, as their best connection to the White House. And although Jeb Bush told me, in an e-mail exchange, that his brother had "an aggressive policy toward the Stalinist regime in Cuba," he also said that its implementation was a "work in progress." This year, to keep the Cubans voting for his brother, Jeb needs help from Washington.

One January afternoon, Jeb Bush was making his rounds in Cuban Miami. The Latin Builders Association was holding a lunch for nearly a thousand, at fifty dollars a head, in a bland function room at a theme park called Parrot Jungle Island. It was all dark suits and silver cell phones, and, for a Latino crowd, it was exceptionally pale, as are most of the Cuban-exile élite. In the parking lot outside, there were a startling number of new Humvees. The Latin Builders Association represents large companies, not small businesses; the organization was started more than a generation ago, when the exiles, who had begun arriving after Castro's revolution, in 1959, looked at the Anglo-dominated Builders Association of South Florida and decided that they needed their own. A bank president named Angel Medina, Jr., introduced the Governor, who got a standing ovation.

Jeb switched back and forth between Spanish and English, and spoke without notes, outlining a seven-point "strategy for growth" for Florida, including encouraging entrepreneurship. But, he said, "I don't need to tell perhaps the most vibrant group of entrepreneurs ever assembled" about that. Jeb's rapport with the Latin Builders was palpable. This wasn't an ethnic-constituency visit; these were his people. "It breaks my heart," he told them, to think that Cubans, their relatives, only "ninety miles from here . . . live under a dictator." The Builders were Jeb's people in another sense as well. When Jeb first moved to Miami, in 1980, Armando Codina, a wealthy Cuban-American developer and a political supporter of George Herbert Walker Bush, gave him a job that put his name on the door, even though he had no experience in real estate. Soon Jeb had a forty-per-cent stake in the new company, Codina Bush Group. Within a few years, he was rich.

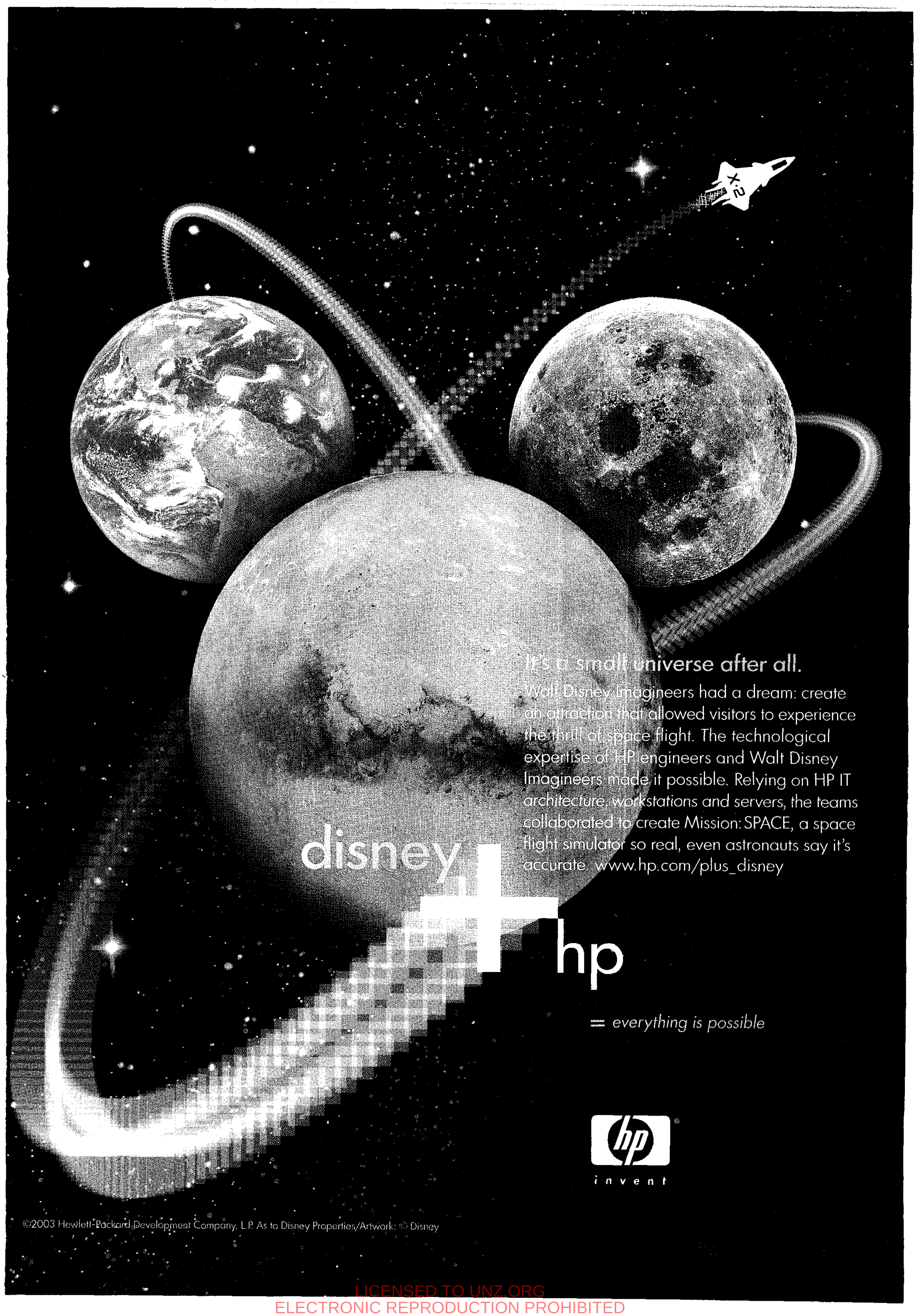
No one could have foreseen just what a perfect fit Miami and Jeb Bush would be—no one except, perhaps, Jeb himself. When he arrived, the city, which had been in a long, slow decline as a winter resort, had been transformed by the influx of refugees, and was the second-largest Cuban city in the world. It was also becoming the de-facto capital of Latin America, both culturally and economically—a boomtown, with Cubans a solidly dominant minority. Jeb spoke fluent Spanish; when he met Columba, in the small Mexican town that she comes from (he was there on a work-study program from prep school), she spoke no English. They married when he was twenty-two and she was twenty-one. After college, he worked for several years at a bank in Venezuela. He showed no talent for banking, but he was keenly interested in making money, which is something boomtowns are good for. He also wanted to live in a bicultural city, for Columba and their children.



Making millions in South Florida real estate in a short time involved, perhaps inevitably, doing business with any number of shady characters. Jeb reportedly was a good salesman, but a number of his business associates ended up in jail for fraud, or fled the country. Armando Codina, who is today one of Miami's wealthiest men, has never been accused of anything illegal, but some of his deals with Jeb are, at least, questionable. In 1984, for instance, Jeb invested a thousand dollars in a downtown tower project with Codina. Six years later, he sold his share for three hundred and forty-six thousand dollars. Jeb received huge commissions for selling real estate to Japanese investors, hawked water pumps in Nigeria while his father was President—the company paid him nearly six hundred and fifty thousand dollars—and, when he moved into public life, he freely mixed his business and his political interests.

Politically, he was deeply conservative—well to the right of his father. He was also far more outspoken than his father in his opposition to Castro. The elder Bush's standing in the exile community has always been ambiguous; his patrician style never played that well in Little Havana. This is not to say that the Bush family as a whole hasn't become extremely popular among Cuban exiles. ("They consider them *their* family," a Miami Democratic Party leader told me ruefully.) But Jeb Bush's constituency among the exiles is mainly the product of his own hard political work. From early on, he carefully learned the elaborate, sorrowing, furious culture of *el exilio.*

Indeed, Jeb Bush is largely responsible for the fact that most Miami Cubans *are* Republicans. Though perennially described as "right-wing Cuban exiles," most of them started out as Democrats. They were (and are) liberal on the social issues that tend to divide Americans, and they share a historic belief in the welfare state—a belief that the Cuban Refugee Program, the most generous immigrant-assistance effort in the history of the United States, only encour-



It's a small universe after all.

Walt Disney Imagineers had a dream: create an attraction that allowed visitors to experience the thrill of space flight. The technological expertise of HP engineers and Walt Disney Imagineers made it possible. Relying on HP IT architecture, workstations and servers, the teams collaborated to create Mission: SPACE, a space flight simulator so real, even astronauts say it's accurate. www.hp.com/plus_disney

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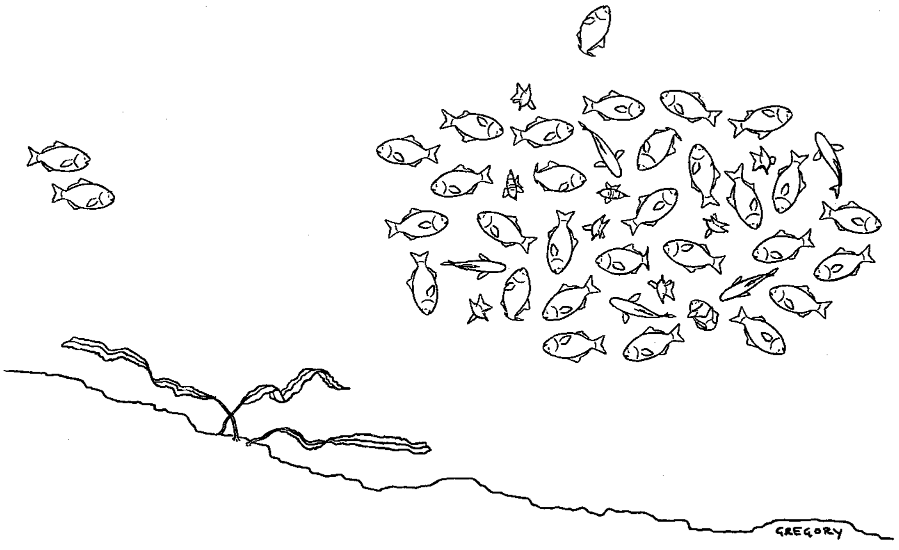


"I believe that's a Montessori school."

• •

himself be identified with causes that, outside the exile community, are seen as dubious at best. For instance, Ros-Lehtinen was one of the leading voices calling for pardons for anti-Castro activists accused or convicted of using violence. One of the more notorious was Dr. Orlando Bosch, who spent eleven years in prison in Venezuela for his alleged role in blowing up a Cuban airliner with seventy-three people on board. (Bosch has never admitted the crime, but he has sought to justify it.) After leaving prison, Bosch was arrested for illegally entering the United States, and the Justice Department, which believed that he had been involved in dozens of acts of terrorism, recommended that he be deported. But Bosch was so popular among Cuban exiles that the Miami City Commission once declared a Dr. Orlando Bosch Day, and when President George H. W. Bush ordered Bosch to be set free in 1990, most observers regarded Jeb Bush as the essential intermediary in the case.

aged. President Kennedy, who was initially adored, was blamed by many exiles for the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, in 1961. And yet their bitterness did not drive them into the Republican Party, which in Miami was weak and uninterested, in any case, in Latino immigrants. Ronald Reagan stirred Cuban-Americans with his messianic anti-Communism. But even he was mistrusted by the exiles, who had been forced to learn, repeatedly, that the interests of any American President only periodically coincided with their own.

Jeb Bush, however, they trusted. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, a Republican congressman from South Florida, described Jeb to me as "a soul mate." Diaz-Balart, who comes from a prominent political family—his aunt was Fidel Castro's first wife—recalls that his grandparents were admirers of Franklin Roosevelt. Diaz-Balart himself was a Democrat until the nineteen-eighties, although the local party didn't take much notice. Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen—another scion of a prominent family, who is also now a Republican representative in Washington—couldn't get through the Democratic primaries in Miami.

Both Diaz-Balart and Ros-Lehtinen credit Jeb Bush with persuading them to switch parties. When Jeb became chairman of the Dade County Republican Party, in 1984, he simply looked at South Florida's demographics, saw the opportunity, and went to work making the Republican Party the natural home for Cuban exiles. In 1979, registered Democrats still outnumbered Republicans among Cuban-Americans by forty-nine per cent to thirty-nine per cent. By 1988, only twenty-four per cent were Democrats, and sixty-eight per cent were Republicans.

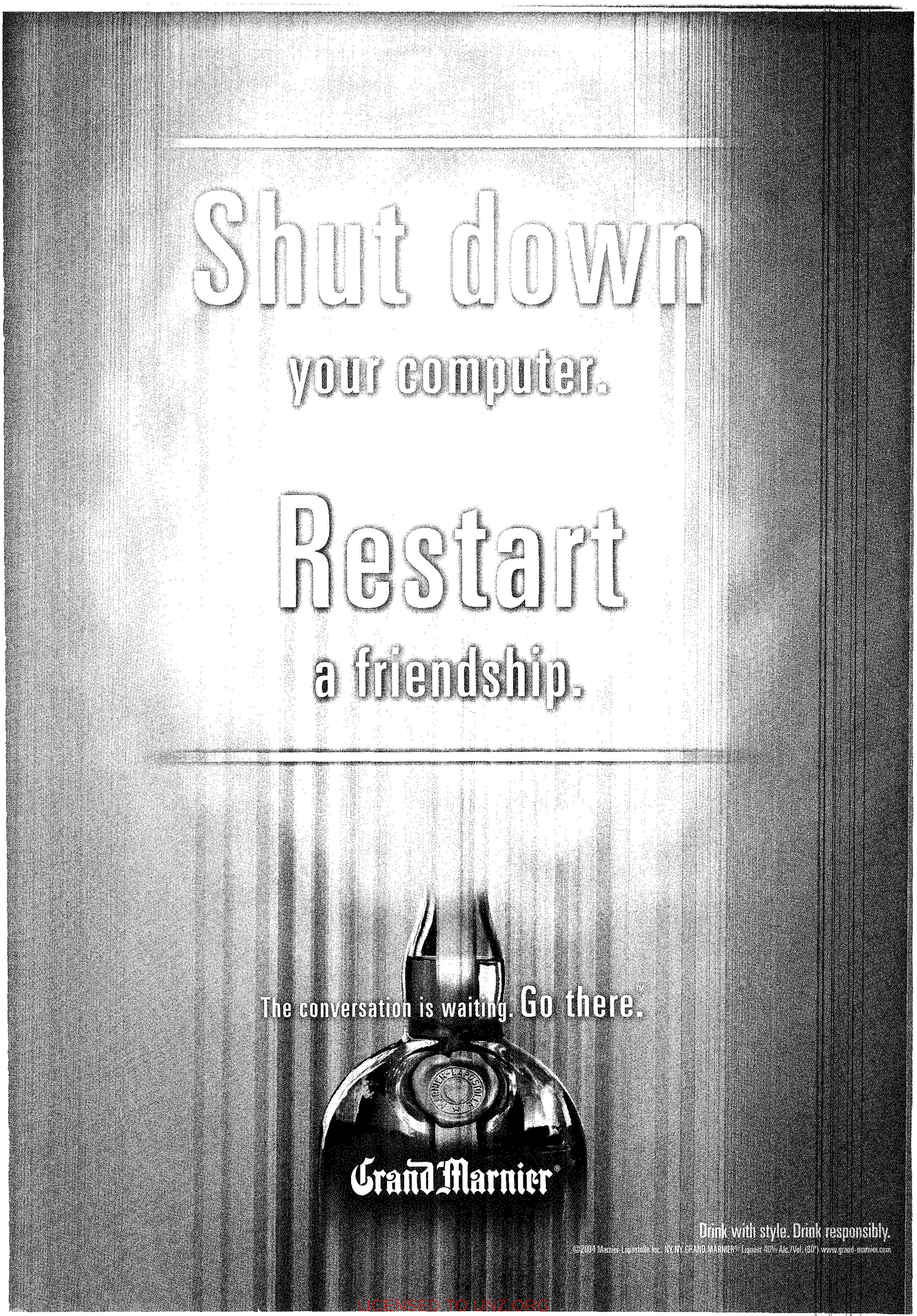
Meanwhile—and this is a typical incongruity—Diaz-Balart runs for reëlection every two years with the support of the union locals in his district and voted against NAFTA. He and Ros-Lehtinen were among the tiny handful of Republicans in Congress who would not sign Newt Gingrich's Contract with America, and voted against the welfare and immigration reform acts in 1996. Jeb Bush, for his part, in his re-inaugural address last year, stood on the steps of the old state capitol in Tallahassee and said, "There would be no greater tribute to our maturity as a society than if we can make these buildings around us empty of workers—silent monuments to the time when government played a larger role than it deserved or could adequately fill."

While Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's politics would seem to put her at odds with Jeb's radical anti-statism, their bonds, too, go deeper than the issues. He managed her first successful campaign for Congress, in 1989. "Jeb took a lot of bullets for me," she told me. What she meant, I gathered, was that Jeb had let

During Jeb's first run for governor, in 1994, he discovered that even heavy support from South Florida's Cubans was no guarantee of statewide victory. He lost that election to Lawton Chiles, a wily old Democrat, and the loss allowed his late-blooming brother to move ahead of him in the race to become the next Bush president. Jeb has since cultivated other constituencies, but if he ever enters national politics he may have trouble defending his political association with the kind of people who would blow a civilian airliner out of the sky.

For many years, polls have shown that exiles' attitudes toward Castro are becoming more moderate. The usual explanation is that the American-born children of the first generation of exiles, known as *los historicos,* are less bitter than their parents, and are assimilating. In fact, though, a startlingly high percentage of young Cuban-Americans—more than any other age group—say they would like to see an American military invasion of the island.

Finer-grained polling shows that it isn't the children of *los historicos* who would prefer a policy of reconciliation—who would like, for instance, to



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the conversation CIRCLE

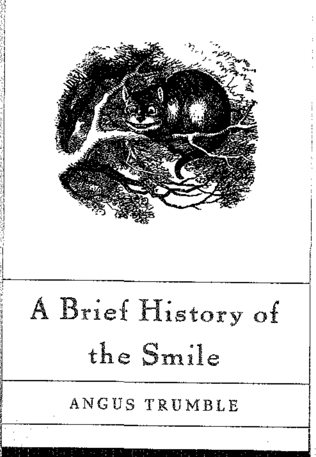
GREAT BOOKS GET PEOPLE TALKING.

Author Angus Trumble, curator of paintings and sculpture at the Yale Center for British Art, recently chatted about his new book "A Brief History of the Smile" from Basic Books.

While these days a smile is regarded as a symbol of joy, this ubiquitous hallmark of mirth has a long and mixed history. Raucous laughter was equated with idiocy in biblical times; toothy smiling was vulgar, or even obscene, a notion that predated the Victorian era. After all, this was behavior befitting lechers and buffoons. Elegantly illustrating his point of view with dozens of works of art, Trumble spins an intriguing treatise on the many meanings of the human smile in his erudite new history.

What inspired you to write a whole book about the smile?

Angus Trumble: Believe it or not, the idea emerged from a dentists' convention. Since the aesthetics of the smile is at the heart of their endeavors, they debated if there was such a thing as a perfect smile. Did great art offer any insights? Their question intrigued me. I was happy to explore the topic, and the book quickly took shape.


A Brief History of the Smile
ANGUS TRUMBLE

Is smiling unique to humans?

AT: No doubt we humans are inclined, in the light of our own experience, to read a merry smile into the upturned muzzle of a dog or the enigmatic grin of a tabby. It's an inherently human characteristic to see ourselves reflected in the animal kingdom, such is our vanity. Indeed, some derivations of the English word "grin" have distinctly warlike connotations, such as the fierce roaring of Vikings, who exported it from Scandinavia.

In this political season, what can you say about the importance of a smile on the campaign trail?

AT: By smiling too much, candidates run the risk of losing the electorate to which they make a direct appeal. Grinning may play into the hands of a shrewd opponent, who will cast the feckless politician in the role of a lightweight show pony, or fool. Before Teddy Roosevelt, presidents rarely smiled. And some might reasonably argue that, these days, there is precious little to smile about.

What is the future of the smile?

AT: The future of my own smile recently took a turn when I chipped a tooth. Of course, many measures are available to perfect our smiles, but I think I'll stick with mine. No matter what we do to improve or alter the way we look, we can be sure that we will all continue to smile. Some of us will do it more than others, others will give the impression that they twinkle, smirk, grin, or beam. A comforting thought.

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see the trade embargo relaxed or repealed. It is, rather, more recent arrivals from Cuba. As Sergio Bendixen, Miami's leading Latino pollster, points out, half of South Florida's Cuban-Americans left the island after 1980, and in many ways this group more closely resembles the "economic" migrants from the Caribbean and Central America than it does the earlier waves of Cuban exiles. Its members are less interested in politics than in improving their lot, and in sending money home. The number of immigrants who have taken American citizenship is lower among more recent arrivals, however, and the number within that group who actually vote is lower still. Thus, *los historicos* are still the group that politicians—Democratic and Republican—must court.

Jorge Mas Canosa, who co-founded the Cuban American National Foundation, the most powerful exile lobby, and who died in 1997, was the closest thing to an unofficial leader that the exiles have had. Mas Canosa amassed power in Miami and Washington through charisma, clever maneuvering, and stark intimidation. He built alliances with and made donations to both parties. Bill Clinton met with him in 1992, and Mas Canosa was sufficiently impressed by Clinton's tough anti-Castro views that, to the dismay of many Republicans—not least Jeb—he declined to endorse George H. W. Bush's reëlection bid.

Recently, I stopped by the office of Joe Garcia, the foundation's executive director. Jorge Mas Santos, the son of Mas Canosa, is now the chairman, but Garcia does most of the talking. Born in Miami, Garcia, who is forty years old, is expansive, articulate, and well dressed. When I saw him, he was blasting the Bush Administration's Cuba policy. "It's inverse Roosevelt," he said. "Speak loudly, leave the stick at home. On rhetoric, they score a hundred per cent. Their rhetoric is better than Bill Clinton's, but that's it. The status quo is unacceptable. Civil society in Cuba is getting only a few million dollars a year from the U.S. Why can't we get creative? Do micro-loans, distribute computers, cameras, phone cards, give scholarships, *anything*."

Garcia was disgusted by what he considered to be the meekness of the Cuban-American congressional delegation. He had publicly called Lincoln Diaz-Balart "politically impotent" for his failure to pressure the White House. Garcia told me, "Their defenders, like Lincoln Diaz-Balart, say, 'Bush will veto any lifting of the embargo.' And that's true. But the embargo isn't what's going to defeat Castro. The embargo is just a tool." Diaz-Balart, however, dismisses criticism of Bush's supposed passivity as part of "Castro's campaign to discourage Cuban-Americans from voting in this year's Presidential election."

In January, Jeb Bush was the guest of honor at the Cuban Liberty Council's annual dinner. The council was formed in 2001, after a group of the more hard-line directors of the Cuban American National Foundation left in protest against its increasing support for dissidents inside Cuba. It had previously been the policy to shun those still living under Castro (and not in jail). None of the ultra hard-liners would visit Cuba, or associate with anyone who did.

Twelve hundred people, nearly all of them senior citizens, filled a ballroom in a Radisson Hotel on Biscayne Boulevard. All conversation was in Spanish. People had dressed up for the event, but they lacked the prosperous sheen of the Latin Builders. Most of the men's suits had a baggy, well-worn look, and there seemed to be a great many mouths set in expressions of permanent disappointment. After an overloud recording of "The Star-Spangled Banner" came an even louder rendition of the strangely Germanic Cuban national anthem. There were eight or nine speakers, not all of whom were engaging, and a stream of coded allusions—one was to a group of four Cubans who have been jailed in Panama for allegedly attempting to assassinate Castro during a state visit. The Liberty Council campaigns for their release.

The evening's headliner was, naturally, Jeb Bush. Mixing English and Spanish, he recited a list of political prisoners. Each name drew a murmur from the audience, and Jeb told the crowd how honored and gratified he was to talk to people who recognized them. Those who complained about the treatment of prisoners in Guantánamo, he said, would be better off fighting for Cuba's political prisoners. He also said, "Now is the time to stop talking." It was time "to create an action plan, so that the freedom of your beloved homeland, the freedom of our neighbor, will happen sooner rather than later. . . . And if anybody doesn't believe that George W. Bush is a man of action, then they've been asleep for the last two years." In his brother, he went on, "the Cuban people have a true ally in the fight for a free Cuba." As for himself, Jeb told the crowd, "I probably have six Cuban grandmothers, and ten Cuban mothers," drawing a laugh. "I feel as much a part of this community as you do, to be honest with you," he said. "You can always count on me to do what I can to make sure that the cause of a free Cuba is front and center in Washington, D.C." His last words were oddly intimate: "I love all of you."

It was what the members of the audience wanted to hear. They cheered—"Jeb! Jeb!"—and mobbed him as he came off the stage, struggling to reach him, a hundred cameras flashing. It was possible to forget, briefly, that the Liberty Council's ultra-hard-line views are really not widely shared. Later, when I asked Jeb if he thought that he had become over-identified with the council, and if that might hurt the Republicans, he said, "I think your assessment is incorrect. . . . The President has broad support amongst the diverse Cuban-American community." But it is those at the margins whom Jeb Bush finds himself almost desperately trying to reassure. And they are not, from all accounts, easy people to step away from.

Radio Mambí is the biggest of Miami's many Spanish-language talk-radio stations, and it's all anti-Castro all the time. Armando Perez-Roura, Radio Mambí's editorial director and its principal on-air voice, is an exile in his seventies. He has a trained, rum-smooth voice, and as a backdrop to his delivery of the evening news the station plays full-orchestra mood music that sounds as if it were emanating from the pit in an old-time movie palace—the effect is retro, rousing, and faintly threatening.

Radio Mambí's listeners are in great part *los historicos*, who are drawn to Perez-Roura's hard-line stands, such as his unapologetic support for Orlando Bosch and others with violent pasts. Jeb Bush is a regular guest on Perez-Roura's show, and, people say, uses Perez-Roura to reach the *abuelitas*—the little grandmothers, who turn out reliably on Election Day, and who follow Perez-Roura's political advice.

When I visited Perez-Roura at Radio Mambí, the atmosphere of denunciation with which he fills the airwaves was absent. Instead, I found a pale, heavy-set, polite, elderly man in an immaculate cream-colored suit. He had only nice things to say about the Bushes. He had been invited aboard Air Force One when the first Bush was President. The Bush whom he, Perez-Roura, knows best is the Governor, and he told me that Jeb is someone "who profoundly understands our pain." (Of Perez-Roura, Jeb says, "I proudly consider him a friend.")

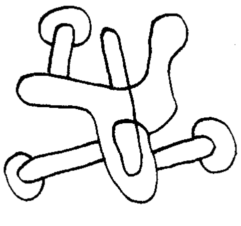
Of course, it's not only Republicans who kowtow to the hard-liners. Watch the Democratic Presidential nominee this year come to Miami and swear fealty to the embargo. The math is not difficult. Endorsing the embargo (which is, after forty-five years, surely the single most unsuccessful major piece of American foreign policy ever) might lose a candidate ten votes in Iowa. But not doing so could lose him a hundred thousand votes in South Florida.

Senator John Kerry clearly has done the calculation. In 2000, he told the Boston *Globe* that the trade embargo arose from the "politics of Florida" and was badly in need of reconsideration. Then, six months ago, after meeting privately with exile leaders, he announced that he favored maintaining sanctions against Cuba.

"Florida politics is deli style," a national Republican operative who has often worked in the state said. "You have so many different groups—the Cubans, of course, but also seniors, Jews, all the other Hispanics, blacks, white veterans up in the Panhandle. The trick to winning Florida is to protect your blocs while slicing some votes off the other guy's blocs. This year, for instance, W. could get significant Jewish votes if he handles the Mideast right." John Kerry, conversely, could do well among the Panhandle veterans, who have voted Republican (while remaining registered Democrats) in recent years. "Obviously, the Cuban vote is critical to winning Florida," the operative went on. "And the fact that W. might be weaker among core Cuban voters is going to make the state much more difficult." Nelson Reyneri, a senior Democratic Latino strategist, recently told the Miami *Herald*, "If we peel off even a small amount of the Cuban-American vote, we win." Every vote in Florida will count this year.

Karl Rove went to Palm Beach for a fund-raiser in January, and was followed the next day by the President. This was George Bush's eighteenth visit to Florida since taking office. I went to watch the President at the P.G.A. National Resort, a "planned golf and entertainment community" in Palm Beach Gardens. It was a cocktail reception for "Pioneers," who raise a hundred thousand dollars for the campaign, and "Rangers," who raise two hundred thousand. People could also get inside by writing two-thousand-dollar checks at the door. (The event raked in one and a half million dollars during the four hours that Air Force One was on the ground.) Five hundred Republicans were on hand, milling about and eating finger food. Something was wrong, however, and it took me a minute to figure out what it was: there were no Cubans, as far as I could tell. It was strictly an English-speaking crowd—men who looked as if they logged a lot of time on the golf course, women in little white silk skirt suits and large pearls. I had driven only seventy-five miles from Miami, but I was in another country.

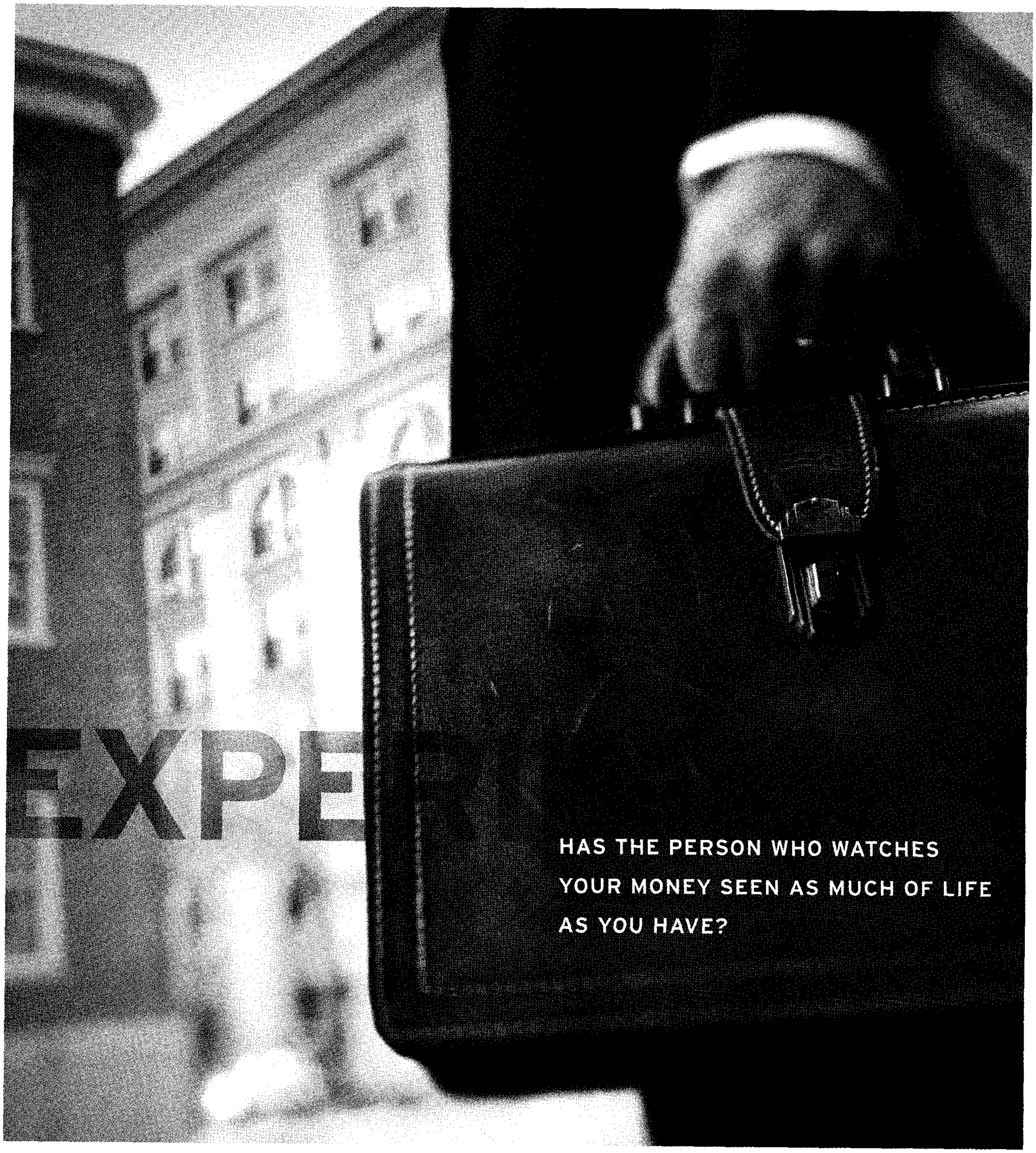
Jeb Bush, who is several inches taller than George W., introduced his brother. The President delivered a stump speech, listing his achievements and asserting his determination to win the war on terror: "We will not stop until this danger to civilization is removed." He spoke for thirty or forty minutes, and toward the end of his remarks I realized that, though he talked in general terms about tyrants, he hadn't once mentioned Castro, or Cuba, or Latin America. These omissions would have been unthinkable in Miami.



I watched Jeb Bush as his brother spoke. He paid attention, grinned and laughed, even ad-libbed when called upon. But he seemed abstracted. He didn't seem out of place, exactly. These were, after all, also his people—Republicans, in his state. I had been observing him lately through the prism of one of his constituencies—the Cuban exiles—but he had many others, including some who, no doubt, didn't care for Cubans at all.

What made him appear abstracted, I decided, was his seriousness, and the need to conceal it in this breezy setting. Jeb has always been the brainiest, most articulate male member of his family—he suffers from none of the dyslogia that afflicts his father and his brother. It is important that Jeb not overshadow George W. on the campaign trail. And it would also certainly be wise to be a relatively fresh face in 2008.

There was, it turned out, at least one Cuban at the Palm Beach Gardens fund-raiser. Mel Martinez, who recently left his post as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development—he was the first Cuban-American to serve in the Cabinet—was, after the speeches ended, all over the room. He was busy shaking the hands of potential contributors to his run, which had just been announced, for Florida's open Senate seat. By most accounts, Martinez himself had only recently learned that he would be running for the Senate. His political hopes had been focussed, rather, on the Florida governor's job after Jeb moved on. But the White House had apparently taken a hard look at the Florida Senate field and decided that what the November ballot needed, in the Republican column, was a nice, big Cuban-American candidate. Such a candidate would pull a lot of Cubans out to vote, including some who might otherwise stay home. And they would presumably vote Republican for President, too. Mel Martinez liked his Cabinet job, but time was short, and now here he was, on the campaign trail, part of Karl Rove's Cuban strategy. ♦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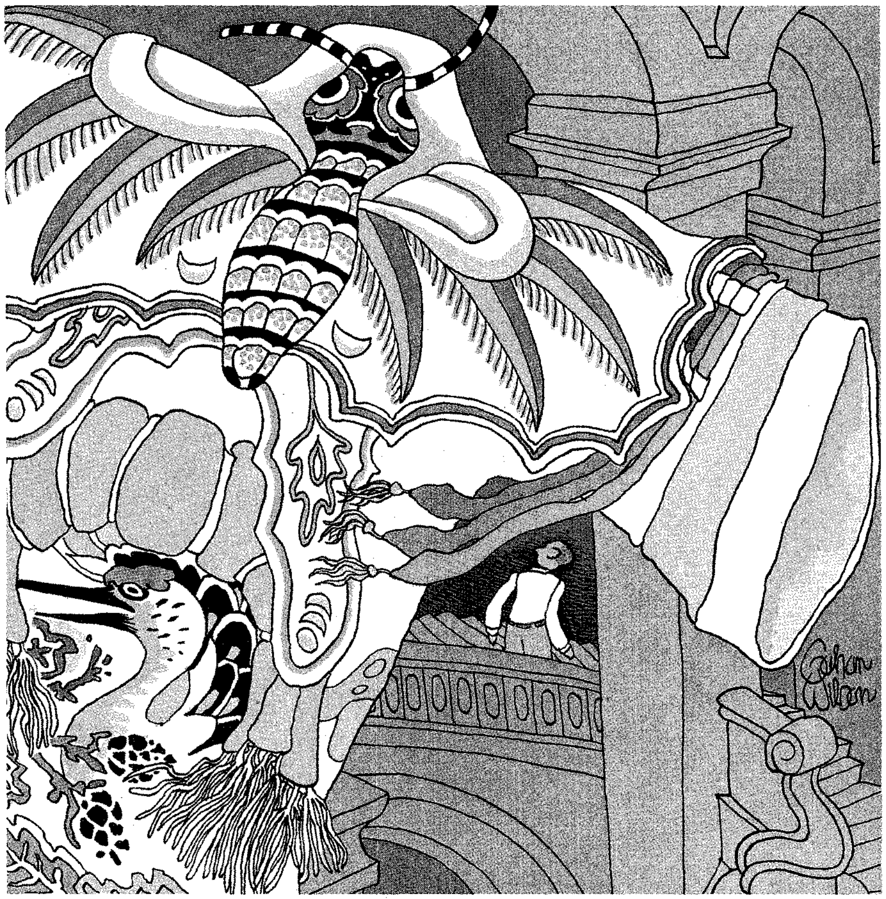
PERSONAL HISTORY

THE KIMONO

My mother's fashion statement.

BY DONALD ANTRIM

One evening not long ago, while I was walking down a set of stairs at the New York Public Library, it occurred to me, as it had on occasions in the past, that there are people in the world who believe in an afterlife, and people who don't; and that Heaven and Hell—or whatever vague and nebulous realms exist (or don't) beyond our consciousness of them or our ability to comprehend their natures—may be populated, as it were, with the souls of those who, during their time among the living, fell into the first category, the category of people who believe.



What, exactly, had my mother made with needle and thread?

GAHAN WILSON

My mother, Louanne Antrim, trusted in her afterlife to come. I am not certain that I can make, on my own behalf, unambivalent claims in relation to the transmigration of souls. Life after death? I do admit that late one night after my mother's father died, in 1995, I had a strong feeling that he had stopped to pay me a visit. For a few moments, I thought of him in his car, parked beside the curb outside my building in Brooklyn. The car, as I pictured it, was running—headlights and tail-lights on. It was October, and exhaust clouded behind the back bumper. Was my grandfather waiting for me to climb out of bed and come downstairs to say goodbye? Was he offering me a ride? I felt him near me. But I did not see him (or his car), and I did not converse with his spirit. What does it mean to feel—or to imagine feeling—the silent presence of someone who has died?

From time to time, I speak to my mother. I am in the habit of occasionally filling her in on my news, explaining some problem or other that has me bothered, or maybe setting her straight, once and for all, on one of our long-standing, unresolved disputes—one of the many white-hot conflicts that were rendered moot by her death, from lung cancer, almost four years ago, at the age of sixty-five.

Anyway, that is what I was doing, that evening not long ago, as I walked down the stairs at the Public Library: I was speaking (in a suitably quiet voice) to my dead mother. And it occurred to me, as I descended the massive Vermont marble stairwell at the northern end of the Humanities and Social Sciences Library, at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, that it was, after all, I who was speaking to my dead mother, and not she speaking to me. In fact, I never, these days, experience anything that I could call a direct communication from her. She does not summon me, as they say, from the beyond, or make her presence in the ether palpable. I do not feel her beside me in a room, or turn suddenly and, glancing over my shoulder, catch a glimpse of—her, not there.

What I am getting at is this: If, when it comes to life after death, I am not (exactly) a believer, why am I talking? To whom do I think I am talking?

When I am talking to my mother—while at home, or out on the street, or in public buildings—there invariably comes a moment when I feel that I can imagine her hovering in the near-distance, usually at a modest height above the ground, just as angels in classical paintings float in the vicinity of the upper corners of their frames. And in the instant in which I imagine her this way—less as an apparition than as a memory, in which she is sometimes a young and attractive version of herself, though more often she is older, and sick, and close to her death—I see not only her face, with her mouth curving mischievously upward at the sides, creating dimples, as it did whenever she was about to laugh or smile; and her eyes, which typically wear, as they wore in life, a look of slight bewilderment, as if everything in the world were too much

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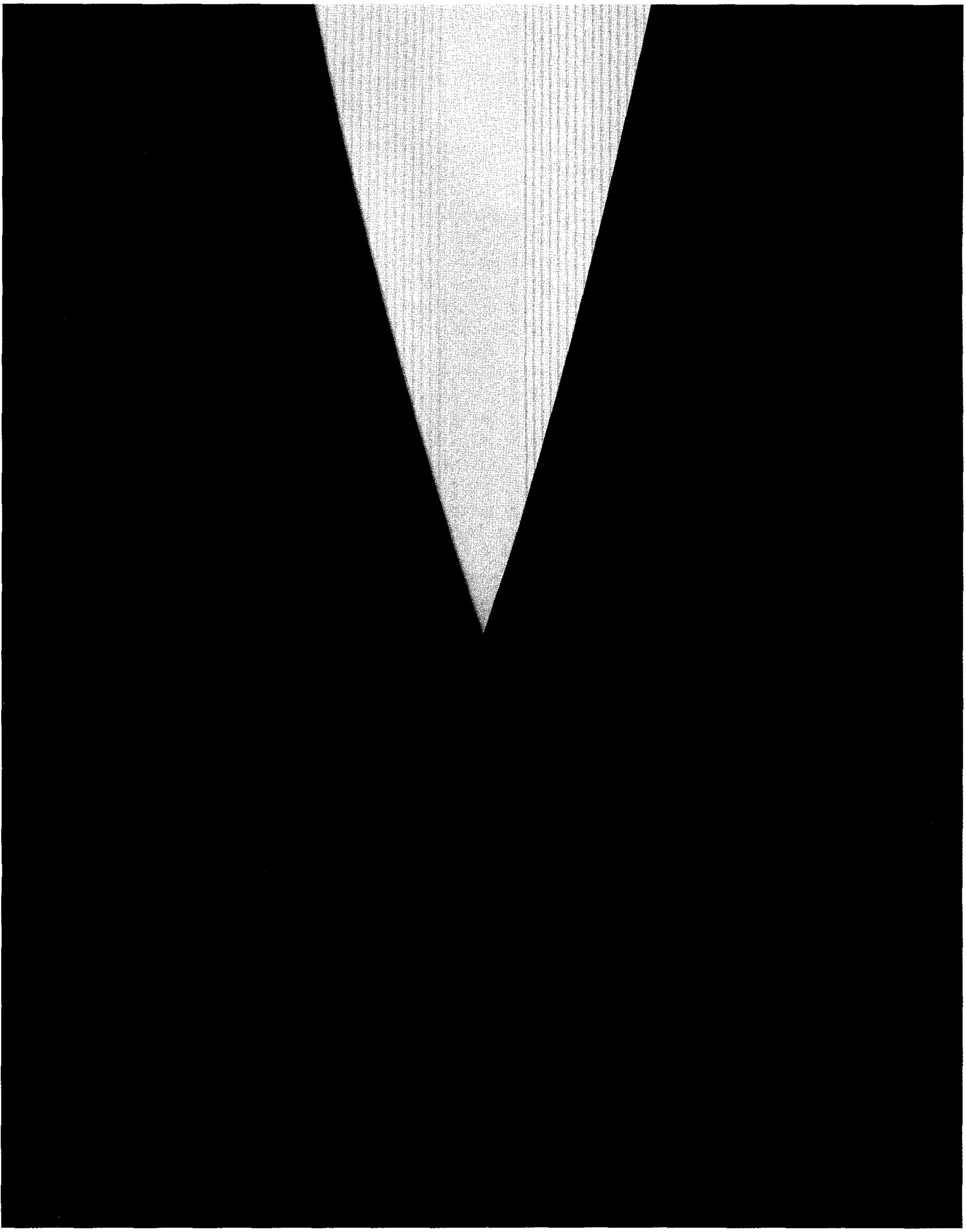

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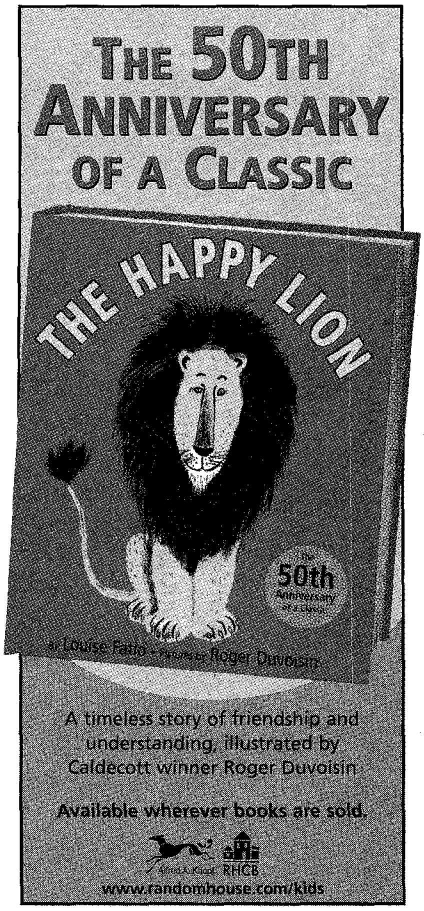

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THE RIGHT STUFF

for her to take in; and her weak, Appalachian chin, the chin that I, too, inherited from our Scottish and English ancestors; and her hair, which, late in her life, looked as if it had been speedily cut with dull shears. I see these things, and then I see the rest of the picture. I see what she is wearing. I see, for one dreadful moment, my mother's clothes.

In particular, I see a garment that she made during the early nineteen-nineties. She was living in Miami, Florida, at the time, operating a small storefront boutique that was intended as a showcase for her own increasingly eccentric fashion designs, but which was dedicated mainly to routine tailoring and alteration jobs. She never got much business. The shop was in a run-down strip mall in an underpopulated district crisscrossed with freeway overpasses, not far from the Miami River. Because the shop was not—nor would it ever be—profitable, my mother relied on her father, who lived in North Carolina, to cover the rent.

I have often wondered what might have happened to my mother in the years after she finally stopped drinking, in 1983—after she'd spent what seemed like years in and out of hospital emergency rooms and detoxification wards; after she and my father had gone their separate ways for good; after she'd impulsively abandoned her career as a teacher and begun repudiating educational and other traditional social institutions as repressive and élitist—I've wondered, as I was saying, what might have become of her, had it not been for her father, who, I suspect, worried over his daughter every day of his life as a parent, and who, in the years before he died, energetically sought reassurance (typically from me, though from others in our family as well) that she would one day overcome her loneliness and anger, and make a place for herself in the world.

"Don, what do you think of your mother's prospects? Do you think her luck might be changing?"

"I don't know, Granddaddy. It's hard to say how things will go when a person is starting a business."

"She's finally figured out what she wants to do, Don. And she's a hard worker."

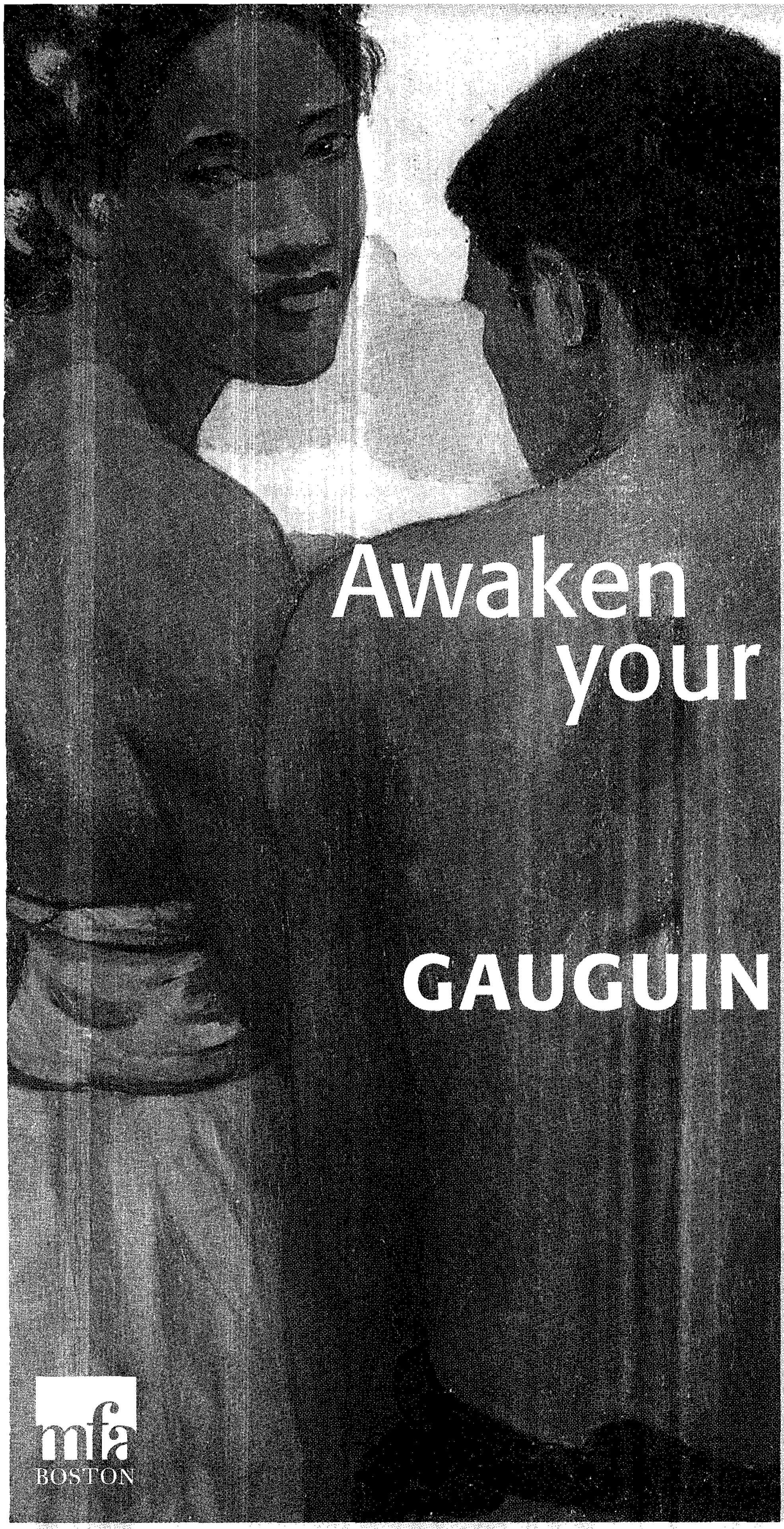
"Yes, she is."

"Do you think your mother can make a profit, Don?"

"A profit? I don't know. Gosh. A profit?"

Could she? I visited the shop in 1993. I was thirty-five. Ten years had passed since my mother's last alcoholic collapse. My father was living with his new wife in southwest Miami. My sister had moved far away from South Florida, to the Pacific Northwest, and begun her own family. And I was living alone in Brooklyn. My mother, with help from the insurance company and her father, had relocated from a condominium that had been torn apart by Hurricane Andrew, the year before, to a one-bedroom apartment with partial views of the Miami River. And she had opened her shop. Its name was Peace Goods.

I remember that the storefront itself was tiny, and the larger building housing it cheaply constructed. I can't recall the businesses adjacent to my mother's. Was there a liquor store? In front of her shop was the parking lot. I remember her being afraid sometimes of the types of people who walked past her door. Her space was, as I recall, brightly lit. The air-conditioning stayed on high. Carpeting was glued to the floor. In the rear of the shop were sewing machines. A tailor's dummy—or were there two?—half dressed in one of my mother's raw-silk works-in-progress, stood beside a large worktable on which she spread and cut fabric. Scissors lay ready for her to pick up, along with spooled threads, sheets of pattern paper, pencils, measuring tape, and pincushions planted with needles. A particular pincushion comes to mind. It looked like a Holland tomato; it might have passed for a child's soft toy. Bolts of cloth leaned in corners. The shop's back door opened onto an alley where my mother went to smoke. She smoked inside, too, constantly, and I remember wondering what her customers thought when they carried home clothes that smelled as if they'd been worn to a night club. Wherever my mother was in her shop—standing at the worktable in her bare feet, measuring cloth; or rummaging around in the back, sorting through woollens and silks imported from Asia and Europe; or relaxing, legs crossed, in one of the chairs near the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Paul Gauguin, *Three Tahitians* (detail), 1899. Oil on canvas. The National Gallery of Scotland, NG 2221. © The National Gallery of Scotland.

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front door—her ashtray and her lighter and her coffee cup were close at hand. Also near the entrance were garment racks draped with clothes left by the few clients who had somehow happened on the place, or who knew my mother from A.A. or from her life before sobriety, when she'd had a traumatized family, a demanding academic job, and nightly blackouts.

In this cramped and vaguely unsafe environment, my chain-smoking, coughing mother began to realize a fashion aesthetic that was, I believe, arguably original and defiantly antisocial.

The garment I often see, whenever I talk to my dead mother, is a silk kimono. The body is white. The sleeves, too, are white, and are encircled with wide bands of machine-made ivory lace. There is a hint of Chanel in the bunched-up lengths of silk crêpe, one in aquamarine, another in a darker blue, and a third in indigo, which are wrapped around each shoulder, and held in place by narrow ribbons sewn like belt loops. These blue and indigo sashes descend from the loops, cascading down the sides of the kimono beneath the arms, and are weighted with horsehair tassels, twelve in all, in the shape of angels.

Suspended over each breast of the kimono, from threads attached to shining stars, are two metallic birds like Christmas-tree ornaments. One tethered bird is yellow and in flight; its opposite is pink and in repose. Directly beneath these swinging birds is a green field of fabric in the shape of a valentine heart, half appearing on the kimono's right side, half on the left. The heart, which stands about ten inches in height, serves as the locus for a gathering of ostensibly reassuring visual elements. On one side, where, if this were a medical illustration, an atrial chamber might appear, a fuzzy white cat—a cat like the dandruffy white cat my mother had then—sits stitched in place. A giraffe peeks from behind the top of the other side, as if looking curiously over a green hill. The scene is pastoral, a nursery picture. In keeping with the theme of childhood innocence, more green fabric extends down and around the garment's sides in the form of two winding, ever-narrowing pathways bordered with elaborately stitched flowers. I am unable to look at these flowers without remembering the poppy fields in "The Wizard of Oz."

CIVICS

Seven wild turkeys have assembled
under the canopy of the biggest pine
just north of the house. They tremble-
quiver violently now and then,

to shake the snow away, then go on
sleeping. Though until they do they resemble
a cluster of god eggs or snow-covered, holy stones,
or better yet the cherished ceremonial bells

somewhere—a government hall, a cathedral—
that some yawning functionary has to tend
and, by virtue of a forgotten decree and a call,
must ring, for some reason, again and again.

—*Robert Wrigley*

And there is more. Ribbons attached in the neighborhood of the green heart hang down below the robe's bottom hem. At the ends of the ribbons are several found and custom-made objects: a piece of quartz, an empty pillbox, a charm made of metal and beads, a peacock feather, and a small pouch—a coin purse—knitted from brightly colored yarn. There are two lace sachets—the frilly sort found in farmhouse bedroom dressers—filled with potpourri. Another ornament, made of felt and shaped like a banana, is, in fact, a yellow man in the moon, featuring a pointy nose, a broad mouth, and sleepy eyes.

In order to see the real action taking place on this garment, however, one must carefully turn it over, lay it flat, and study the back.

At the bottom, there is a section of dark-blue and white overshot—a traditional handwoven fabric used mainly for bedcovers—cut more or less in the shape of a pedestal. Flanking the pedestal are four decorative patches, two on each side, made from floral embroidered silks in black, gold, pink, bronze, silver, white, and blue. The patches are stitched on at angles. Are they meant to look like pockets? Are they badges? There's something purposefully crazy about their off-kilter placement, as if they were intended to communicate the designer's sense of spontaneity and play, her awareness of the life to be found in all things, even remnants of cloth. Directly above the dancing patches runs the continuation of the band of green fabric. This green strip is hung with bronze and silver pendants—coins, seashells, and starfish. A lion and a horse, made from painted bamboo, descend from strings attached to the kimono's mid-regions; they function together as toy sentinels guarding a complicated piece of Chinese fabric that looks, from a distance, a little like the head depicted in Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Instead of Munch's wailing face, however, there can be found, at the center of this fabric, a water bird—a golden crane with a black beak, dark eyes, and a red crest. Around this crane my mother has sewn a standard—a green organza horseshoe, held in place by loops of silver ribbon. The tail ends of the standard are tasselled—not with ornamental angels but with delicate white tassels, the kind appropriate, I would think, for creating a fringe on a lampshade.

One more feature needs description. This is an object that covers—as if it had flown in from mountainous lands where giant, benign creatures dwell; found itself over southern Florida; gazed down and seen, from high above the clouds, my mother at work in her shop; then descended and landed in her fields of silk, where it got comfortable and

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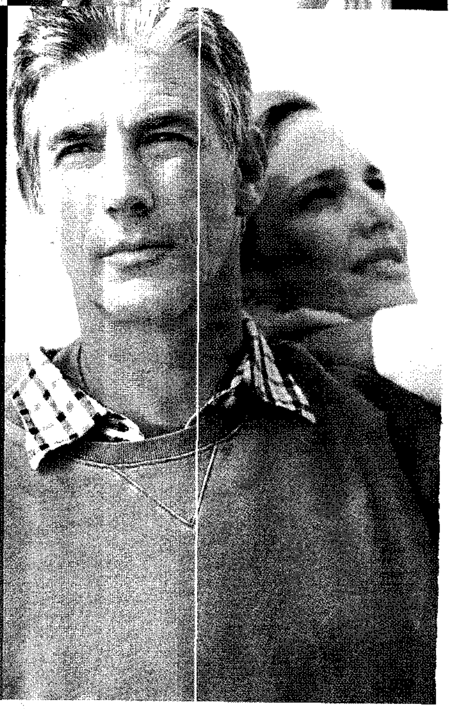
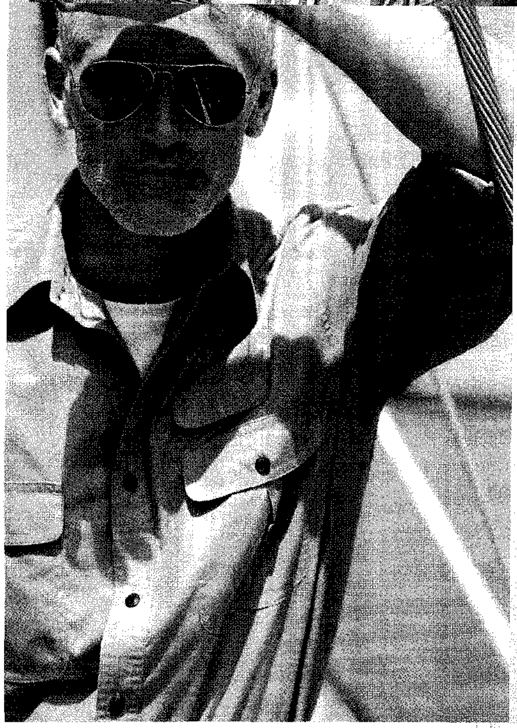
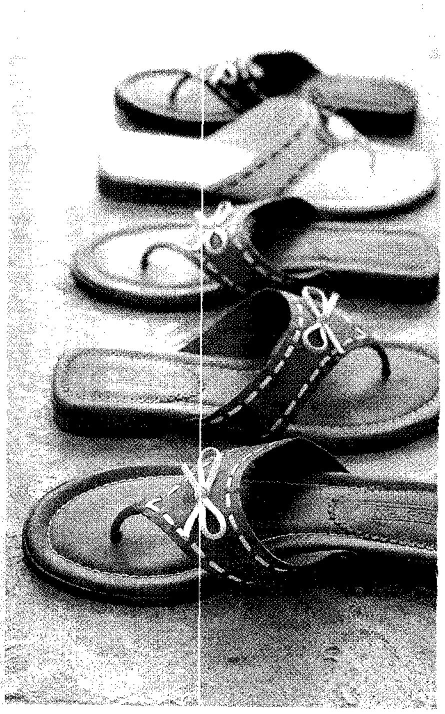






decided to stay—this object, as I was saying, covers the entire upper back of the kimono. It is an enormous, enormously winged butterfly.

The body of the butterfly is something my mother bought in a store. Its skin is paper, stretched over a lightweight wooden frame like a kite. I suspect it may be an Indonesian export. It is three-dimensional and elongated—with a proper head, an abdomen, and a waspish tail—and is attached to the garment along the back seam, running head to tail vertically down the wearer's spine. Its outstretched wings, which are made of soft, quilted silk, reach to the kimono's shoulders and are a dull white, painted with pastel swirls and stripes. As a crowning touch, the butterfly displays two glittering antennae that extend upward from its head. Were you to put on the robe, the antennae might get caught in your hair. Or maybe not. I can't say. I don't have any hair. None to speak of.

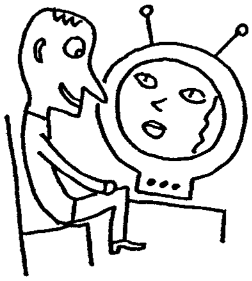
For more than ten years, from the time my family landed in Miami until the beginning of her sobriety, my mother ran a program in fashion, textiles, and costume history at Miami Dade College. She had a small faculty beneath her, and many students. Frequently, she was up and out of the house by sunrise. She might not return before evening. She slept little. Instead, she drank. My father was her partner in this. As evening turned to night, the two of them fought. As the night got late, she went after him with greater and greater fury. A woman had come between my parents in the early years of their marriage, and brought about their first divorce. After their remarriage, when I was nine and my sister, Terry, eight—and until their relationship ended for good, fifteen years later—the memory of that woman haunted our family. Many times, following a bout of fighting, when my mother had tumbled into bed or lost consciousness in a chair, my father wept and apologized.

"I'm sorry," he would say to me and my sister, and the look on his face showed that he meant it. But though he did not intend to, and could not have known it, he was apologizing our mother out of existence. He was apologizing himself and his children out of existence, when he whispered to Terry and me, "Your mother works hard all day at school. She works so hard. She's just tired. She's tired."

"She's not tired!" I shouted back. "She's an alcoholic!" No one was listening. Who pays attention to an unhappy fourteen-year-old? And, after all, my mother wasn't the only one who was tired. All our lives were given over to her rage. I once marvelled that my father could endure my mother. I found his martyrdom, as I thought of it then, honorable. It seemed to me that our family was guided by a bleak, incomprehensible fate. It wasn't incomprehensible, though, and it wasn't fate guiding us. It was alcohol.

After the nights came mornings. My sister and I got out of our beds, put on clothes, and marched from the house to the corner where the school bus stopped. In this we took our mother's lead, our mother who lit a morning cigarette, swallowed her coffee, and, without memory of herself in her darker form, went to the office. In those days, the early seventies, her work at the college did not figure much in our family's daily life. It was not something that we talked about. It was never celebrated. She was alone in her work, and she was alone at home, and her isolation—from her children, from her husband, from the world—informed her later use of fashion, a medium she understood, to tell her life story.

But there is a problem. Fashion, as the work of the art historian Anne Hollander has taught me to think of it—and I refer not only to clothes, stylish or otherwise, and the ways they evolve and are worn, but to the meanings and associations drawn from stylistic variations or the lack of variations in clothes—fashion, whether considered a high art form or not, remains explicitly a visual and tactile language, a language written in an alphabet of colors, shapes, textures, and forms that subtly shift and change from season to season, and from year to year, over the decades of our lifetimes. Fashion is a communal dialogue, a conversation that never stops—on the subjects of desire, power, kinship, and the passing of time—between people living together in a society. What happens to the conversation, though, when the primary society known by a maker of clothes consists of a dying family—a family that, night after night, year after year, apologizes itself out of existence?



There was a week in the early nineties when my mother, driving her station wagon from Miami, and I, flying south from New York, met in Black Mountain, North Carolina, at the home of her parents. She'd brought with her a selection of her wearable creations, and she was eager to show them off. One night after dinner, she led me and my grandparents to the hallway closet. One by one, she pulled out the garments she'd been working on in her shop near the Miami River, the garments she thought of as works of art. Among them, I recall, was the kimono adorned with butterfly wings.

I watched the faces of her elderly, Southern Presbyterian parents. My mother's mother touched the fabrics and said, "Oh, look at this," and "How about that." And she appreciated, in a reserved though generous manner, her daughter's workmanship with needle and thread. But what, exactly, had my mother made with needle and thread? This wasn't clear to me or to my grandparents, who were, frankly, distraught. They didn't know what to say to their daughter.

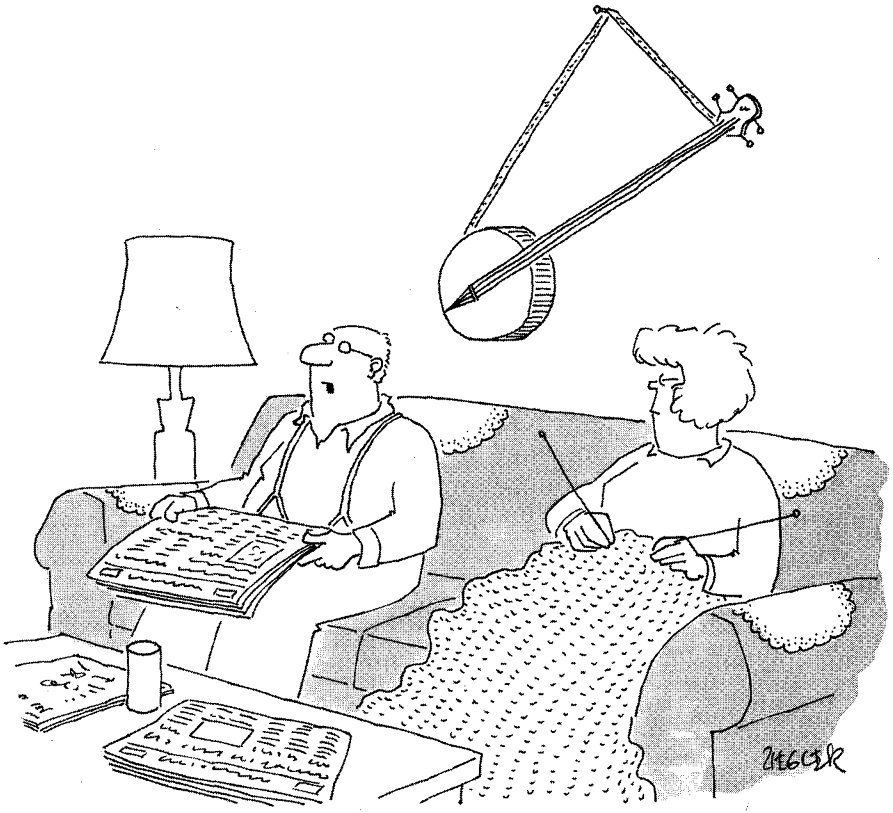
After a long moment, we retreated from the closet in the hallway. We went to the living room and sat. The television was tuned to the Tony Awards. My mother had always loved Broadway musicals. After a while, I looked away from the screen, and saw, on my mother's face and in her slumped posture, in the way she blew cigarette smoke forcibly from her mouth, her angry disappointment.

Had she pulled out hangers draped with clothing that showed either an ironic exaggeration or a direct repudiation of contemporary fashion ideals—glamorously deglamorized dresses in the mid-nineties Comme des Garçons mode, for instance, or radical versions of men's suits executed as statements to be worn by women—her parents might have been similarly perplexed and anxious. But I would have understood that she was making something that, however odd her choices may have appeared at first glance, could nevertheless be worn in the world in a way that communicated to the viewer, in a relatively direct manner, aspects of her desires and her attitudes about the body, about shape and form, about seduction and the politics of public life. I understand that a comparison between my mother's clothes and European and American runway designs is not entirely fair. I also realize that her parents and her son were not the perfect audience for her fantastic productions. In spite of this, it could be argued that the scene that night in Black Mountain had a significance that reached beyond the domestic realm of my grandparents' house in the Smokeys, that realm dominated, for a brief hour years ago, by my mother's need to simultaneously please, shock, fascinate, and alienate the people she most loved and hated, her family.

She showed us her work. We fled. She risked our misunderstanding and disapprobation, our attempts at praise, our confusion and neglect. In this risk and its result—her suffering—she found proof of herself as an original and subversive artist.

Was it so? Was my mother ahead of her time, destined for acceptance by some future civilization, as she proclaimed more than once in the years leading up to her death? And what of that future world? By whom would it be inhabited? For whom was my mother's work meant?

The robe is titled "The Heroine's Journey," and yet it is neutral in relation to the wearer's sexuality, age, and social position. It neither shapes itself around nor imposes shape on the body. From a distance, it looks like a vestment worn by an Episcopal priest, though, with its tassels and wings, it is clearly more pagan than Protestant. It is a peaceable kingdom crowded with personal spirit guides and pets—the birds, the lion, the horse, the giraffe, the cat—a menagerie of wild and tame hieroglyphs guiding the kimono's wearer, the heroine, safely down the green road bordered with flowers and paved with magical coins. The robe takes on the life of all the lives emblazoned on or suspended from it, and it imparts this life to the person wearing it. But what manner of life is this? Neither earthbound nor confined within the mortal body, it is a life that is at once sacred and secular, shapeless and formal, youthful and aged, innocent and experienced, ancient and modern, fleeting and everlasting.



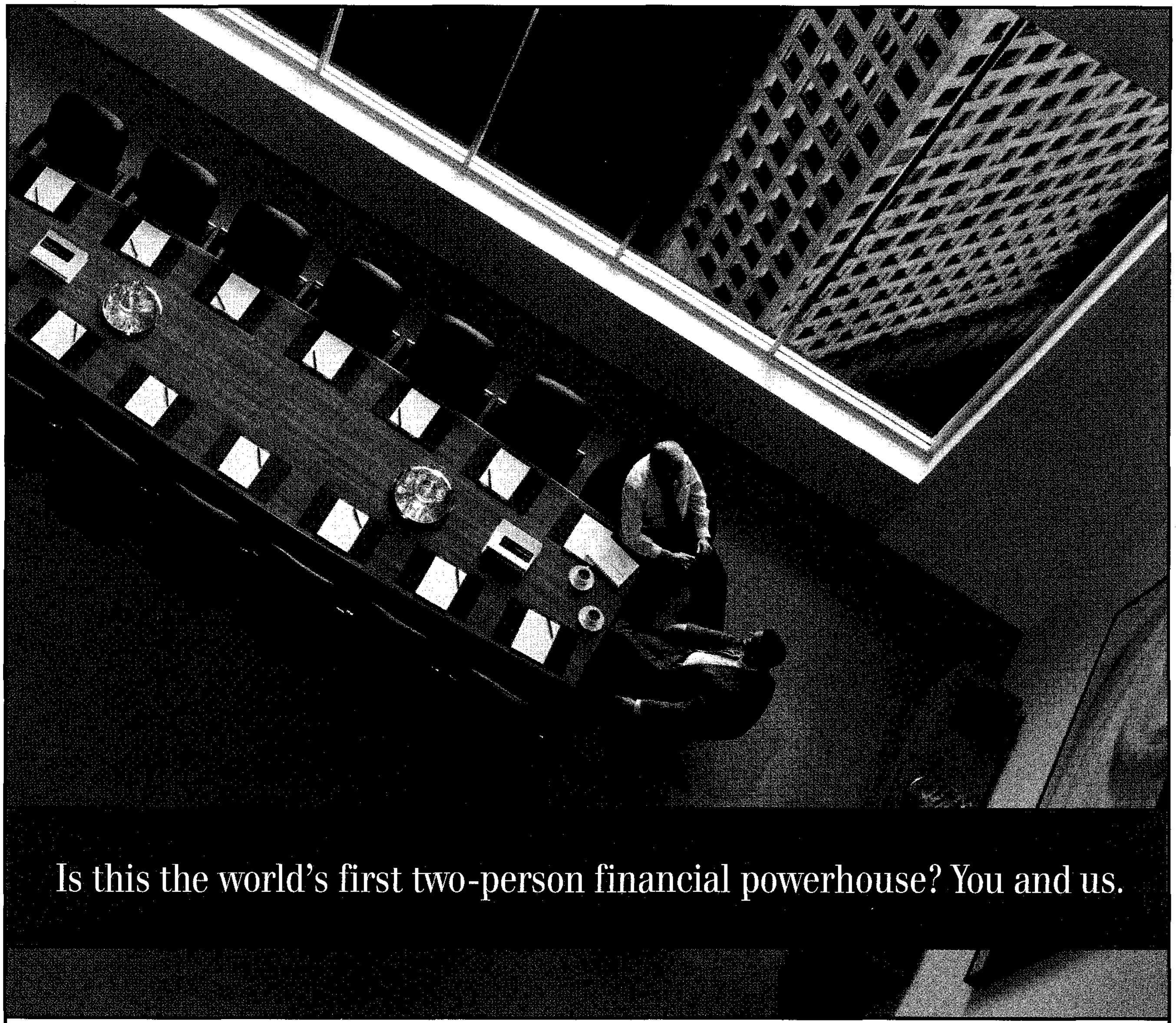
"How long has it been now, Mary, since I've been off the charts?"

The year before she died, I met my mother in Philadelphia. It was the spring of 1999. Her father had been dead for four years, and her mother was soon to follow. Not long after her father's passing, my mother had abandoned Miami and her air-conditioned shop beneath the expressway overpasses. She'd packed up her sewing machines, her tailor's dummies, her buttons, her worktable, her fabrics and scissors, her pincushions and measuring tapes, and Merlin, her new cat—the scruffy old white one had finally given up the ghost—and, using money left by my grandfather, she'd purchased a little one-story house at the bottom of a road in Black Mountain. Now, three years later, she'd driven north to attend the art-school graduation of F., a friend from the Florida years who had relocated to Philadelphia. At the ceremony, F. and my mother met a gallerist who worked in the Old City district. This person expressed interest in my mother's clothes, and my mother formed the impression that the gallery would give her a show.

One Saturday morning in May, I got on a train to Philadelphia. F. lived in a red brick house on a quiet Center City street. I took my time walking from the station. I had a bad feeling about the day ahead. My mother's health had been declining for decades, and in recent months she'd begun to get acutely sick. I was afraid of what I was going to see, and of what I was going to feel.

I wasn't wrong to worry. When I saw my mother, I wanted nothing more than to lower my head, turn away, and walk steadily and without stopping back to the station.

Instead, she and F. and I went out to a café. I did my best to suppress my embarrassment at my mother's loud speaking voice. It seemed to me that she was trumpeting and boasting. Were people staring? I enacted my habitual performance of reticent whispering, as if I might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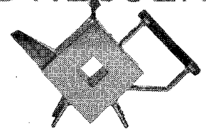

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(finally, after all these years) make my whereabouts unknown, or, failing that, take cover from her explosive proclamations concerning her artistic sovereignty and the stupidity of people who lack the courage to free themselves from the patriarchal oppressions suffocating creative people everywhere!

I recall that F. was wearing a jacket my mother had made, a short coat decorated with contrasting fabric pieces stitched in geometric patterns. F. wore the garment comfortably. If the embellished kimono represented couture, the jacket might have come from the Peace Goods sportswear line. I wondered, as I sat with my coffee, whether F. would continue wearing it once my mother had got in her car and headed south.

We paid the check, got up from the table, and began our pilgrimage to the gallery where my mother hoped to be welcomed as a new artist. It was a long journey over a short distance. I watched my mother struggling to breathe; and I noticed her preparing to reach for the nearest fixed object, a lamppost or a parking meter that could steady her, if she suddenly needed it. Had she gained weight? Lost weight? What about the cough? Had her hacking grown worse? Why did her hair look so dead? Was she having trouble carrying her portfolio? And where had she got to all of a sudden?

"Mom? Mom?"

There she was, half a block behind, standing in the heat, lighting a cigarette with a shaking hand, looking lost.

"Mom, are you all right? Do you want to rest a minute?"

"No. I'm fine. I don't need to rest. Let's get to the gallery. How far is it, Don?"

"It's not far. It's up here. Mom, can you make it? Do you want me to carry your portfolio?"

"No."

"Have you seen a doctor, Mom?"

"I have a doctor at home, Don. Let's get to the gallery. They're expecting me. I have an appointment."

But what kind of appointment? When we finally got down the block and through the door, the woman behind the front desk recommended that my mother leave slides and a résumé and wait to be contacted. This is normal-enough procedure, but my mother, who had garrulously promoted the narrative of her imminent ascension, took it as a blow. She stood before the receptionist's desk. I was terrified that she would become insistent. I felt her anger and her humiliation, and I felt my own humiliation. I dithered around the gallery space, then sneaked out and paced back and forth on the sidewalk. It was a while before my mother and F. came outside. F. encouraged my mother not to get upset. But my mother had tipped into one of her bitter, bewildered moods.

The walk to F.'s house was only a few blocks. Nevertheless, it was too much to ask of my mother, so we hailed a taxi. When we got to F.'s, we decided to have an early supper. There was leftover fried chicken in the refrigerator, and we could eat outside. F.'s street was a dead end and got little traffic; the residents used the street and the sidewalk as a kind of communal square, and they occasionally set up chairs and tables beneath the old trees that formed a low canopy overhead.

It was evening, and the air was warm and still. The three of us sat in a circle, eating with our hands. For years, my mother had had the habit, in public and in private, of announcing, as an artist, her identification with me. She believed that we understood each other, and were fundamentally alike, but she never spoke about our creative interrelatedness in terms having to do with art. Instead, she proclaimed our shared alienation from the noncreative world. "We don't need to worry about what other people think, Don," she might say. And she might add, "We don't fit in."

My mother may have made a few such claims that night when she, F., and I sat down to dinner. I don't remember. All I could do was watch her eat.

She sat facing me. She took large bites, and bits of food spilled down her front as she chewed. My mother's eating was repellently sensual. She ate, it seemed to me, without awareness of herself; and the impression she gave was of something gone mortifyingly wrong, as if perhaps, at age sixty-four, she were making her first attempt to learn table skills. She wasn't a toddler, though; she was sick, and denying her sickness. In four months, she would learn that she was dying.

I looked away. I was a man in his forties, afraid of his mother. Or maybe I was afraid *for* her. I looked again, and we made eye contact, and it crossed my mind that she was a crazy person wearing crazy clothes of her own crazy design, with a crazy person's hairdo atop a head brimming with strange hallucinations in which she conversed with a crew of spirits that included the Virgin Mary and Jesus himself. These spirits related to her as a peer. The fact of their communications reinforced her belief in herself as spiritually and emotionally super-evolved, and this belief, in turn, supported her image of herself as a heroine on a journey. In this romantic-journey scenario, her failures and losses in life were grand successes.

As for the kimono? In spirit, it reflects its maker's predicament. My mother's entire relationship to fashion was one of passionate ambivalence. Her mother had pushed her into vocational home economics in both high school and college, and she later envied my father, a teacher of literature, his exalted access to higher things. She never wore the French and Italian designs that she showed her students in pictures during those years when she had an academic job. She liked to drive to the Neiman Marcus store in Bal Harbour, but she rarely, if ever, bought anything. She said that she could not afford Chanel and Dior, but I suspect that the truth was more complicated. The coats and hats and dresses she most admired represented for her, I think, a world beyond her compass. In the sixties, when she and my father were beginning their first divorce, she led a group of fashion students on a European tour, and later she took a few trips overseas and to New York, but these places remained faraway lands. In the seventies, after remarrying my father, she got her Ph.D. from the College of Home Economics at Florida State University—her dissertation was titled "Exploratory Study of Quality Control Problems and Procedures in the Manufacture of Junior and Misses Fashion Apparel in Dade County, Florida." However, this achievement did not elevate her academic standing in terms that she felt were sufficiently appreciated by her family or her colleagues. In the eighties, after she had finally separated from my father, and then miraculously attained sobriety, she turned her back on teaching. And, in the late eighties and the nineties, her Peace Goods years, she began exploring popular alternative philosophies, most of which were formed, it seemed to me, from blends of astrology, Jungian psychology, Native American mythology, and various recovered-memory and past-life regression theories and therapies—the ad-hoc religions of the New Age. These philosophies essentially gave my mother permission to imagine the world as a place of her own making. She never, I think, stopped being a child.

The world depicted on the kimono is the world inhabited by that child, a world full of storybook animals waiting to accompany the heroine on her journey to forever. But, as we have seen, the heroine's heart is broken.

When my mother was living, I turned away from the clothes she made, as I turned away from her. I did not honor her. I assumed that my reaction to her creations would be shared by most people. She eventually managed to exhibit the robe in galleries in the Pacific Northwest and in Florida. I have a photograph of it in a show, hanging from its sleeves on a pole.

But to see her wearing it—and I remember that I did, one day at her house in North Carolina, though I wonder, sometimes, whether I only imagined this—to see her wearing the robe was to experience its power. My mother was tall and sedentary, and in her later years she ate poorly. Alcoholism and smoking had broken her down. Her face looked worn and, as my father had always said, tired. That day in Black Mountain, she put on the robe, drew it close around her, and stooped beneath the low ceiling in her living room, the room partly taken up with the worktable she'd carted north from her shop in Miami. On the wall above my mother's worktable was a series of construction-paper collages she'd made. The collages told a familiar story of benevolent animals accompany-

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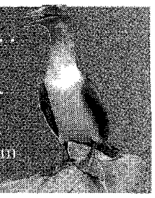


POSTMARK

InterContinental HONG KONG

Ancient Traditions Meet Post-Modern Chic

The Chinese have long believed the mountains of mainland Hong Kong shelter dragons that descend at dawn each day to bathe in the harbor, and come again at dusk to sip from the sweet waters of the South China Sea.

Although no one knows for sure, the legend is said to derive from the time of Emperor Ping, the twelve-year-old monarch who ruled over the last tragic days of the Sung Dynasty. Fleeing the Mongol invasion of northern China, the young ruler and his courtiers took refuge along an obscure stretch of the southern coast. Ping, in his youthful innocence, counted the mountains behind their encampment. There were eight peaks, and, given the ancient Chinese belief that a dragon inhabits every mountain, the emperor decided to call the area Eight Dragons. When it was pointed out by a quick-witted aide that the emperor is also a dragon, Ping quickly changed the name to "Kowloon" (Nine Dragons).

Seven hundred years later, the northern shore of Hong Kong harbor is still called Kowloon. And to listen to the locals, those dragons are still around, going about their daily routine and keeping tabs on a place that has been their home since the dawn of time. Even skeptics admit that these mythological creatures continue to have an incredible influence on modern Hong Kong life.

Twenty some odd years ago, when architects were designing the structure that is now the InterContinental Hong Kong, dragons were very much at the forefront of their planning. The hotel (originally called The Regent) was slated for a waterfront site that would have blocked the dragons' path to the harbor, creating negative "chi" or energy flow.

As a result, the architects included a number of design features to appease the creatures. Dragons apparently have a soft spot for baubles, and the pearl-themed fountain at the hotel's entrance entices them to enter the lobby. Once inside—and given the fact that dragons, much like ghosts, can move freely through glass—they have a direct path through the hotel to their waterfront bathing

POSTMARK

INTERCONTINENTAL HONG KONG

Complementing the ingenious cuisine of SPOON by Alain Ducasse is Tony Chi's ultra-hip décor—modern French Provincial chairs with eel-skin upholstery, sofas with mink cushions, and expansive plate-glass windows with harbor views. Hovering above the dining room, more than five hundred Venetian mercury-glass spoons adorn the ceiling.

By Joe Yogerst

and drinking site on Victoria Harbour. Their auspicious passage through the lobby each day is said to enhance the hotel's feng shui and ensure its continued success.

Given the tremendous acclaim that followed the hotel's launch, you've got to think that maybe there is something to all this dragon business. The hotel has earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the world's best in terms of just about everything by which hotels are judged—service, décor, cuisine, and location. Since its reincarnation in 2001 as the InterContinental Hong Kong, the hotel has a thoroughly new look while maintaining the ingenuity (and feng shui) of the original design.

Shades of celadon, celery, and aubergine, as well as stylish new contemporary furnishings, give the lobby a lighter, brighter feel that is punctuated by that drop-dead gorgeous view across the harbor to Hong Kong Island. No matter how many times you've come and gone, it's still the sort of view that makes you pause for a moment and simply stare in wonder.

Upstairs, the new Club InterContinental tenders its own stunning panoramas. A private haven where hotel guests can conduct business or simply relax, the Club Lounge is at once spacious, luxurious, and cutting edge. Flat-screen televisions, high-speed broadband Internet access, and Nakamichi listening stations are set against a handsome backdrop of sycamore paneling, Barcelona chairs, and zebra checkerboard floors. Among the lounge's other treats are full breakfast, afternoon tea, and evening cocktails with free-flowing Dom Perignon—a fitting complement to all those waterfront lights twinkling beyond the translucent glass walls. With pampering so perfect, you're tempted to never leave.

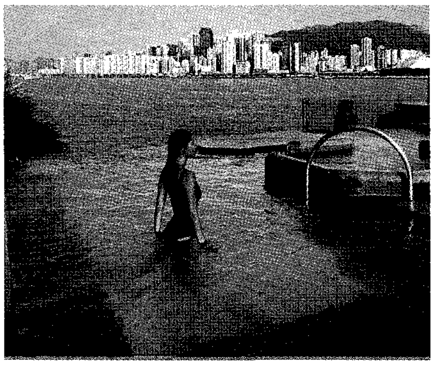
Equally enticing and innovative is InterContinental's sophisticated new restaurant, SPOON by Alain Ducasse. This world-renowned chef already runs top-notch restaurants in cities the likes of Paris, London, and Saint-Tropez. His "total concept" includes a contemporary French menu that runs the gamut from

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF INTERCONTINENTAL HONG KONG

mouthwatering appetizers like *ceviche grenobloise* to entrées like poached Boston lobster.

The hotel's expanded spa and fitness area—redubbed I-Spa—has also undergone a considerable face-lift, and once again, ancient principals have determined its final look. Under the direction of renowned feng shui master Chan Xue Tao (Hong Kong's "other" famous Jackie Chan), I-Spa uses the five basic elements—water, wood, fire, earth, and metal—to achieve a perfect balance of yin and yang. In real-world terms this translates into Hong Kong's ultimate spa retreat with private and luxurious spa suites—each with an auspicious Chinese name and its own jacuzzi, sauna, and steam shower. The signature Oriental healing and jet-lag relief treatments are designed to relax and rejuvenate even the most weary and stressed traveller.

InterContinental Hong Kong's other trump card is its sublime location at the tip of Kowloon, within walking (or ferry) distance of most of the urban lures. Right outside the hotel is the city's artistic nexus—the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (home to the local philharmonic and traditional Chinese orchestras, as well as host to many touring productions). A few steps down the waterfront is the Star Ferry terminal with those romantic old green-and-white boats that have been lumbering across the harbor since 1898.



Ferries to Hong Kong's Central District are available; others go to a bustling nightlife area called Wanchai where the legendary Suzy Wong once strutted her stuff.

The hotel is only moments away from a modern shopping, eating, and business district called Tsim Sha Tsui. Nathan Road, just across the street, runs straight up the center of Kowloon, a veritable canyon of neon with bustling shops, where you can purchase everything from the latest digital cameras to local delicacies like *pei dan* (preserved duck eggs soaked in a brew of tea leaves, lime, and wood ash, and then covered in a protective coating of mud, ash, and rice husk. Needless to say, it's an acquired taste.)

Looming on the horizon and poking their heads over the hotel are the peaks of Kowloon, where those legendary dragons are said to dwell. A well-marked trail runs across the crest of the range, offering fabulous panoramas. At the end of an exciting day of exploration, there's no more refreshing an experience than to sample a Nine Dragons cocktail in the hotel's dramatic Lobby Bar—just you and the dragons and the world's most stunning view.

(California-based Joe Yogerst is the author of the "Insight Pocket Guide to Hong Kong." His work has appeared in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Islands*, *Outside*, the Washington *Post*, and the Los Angeles *Times*.)

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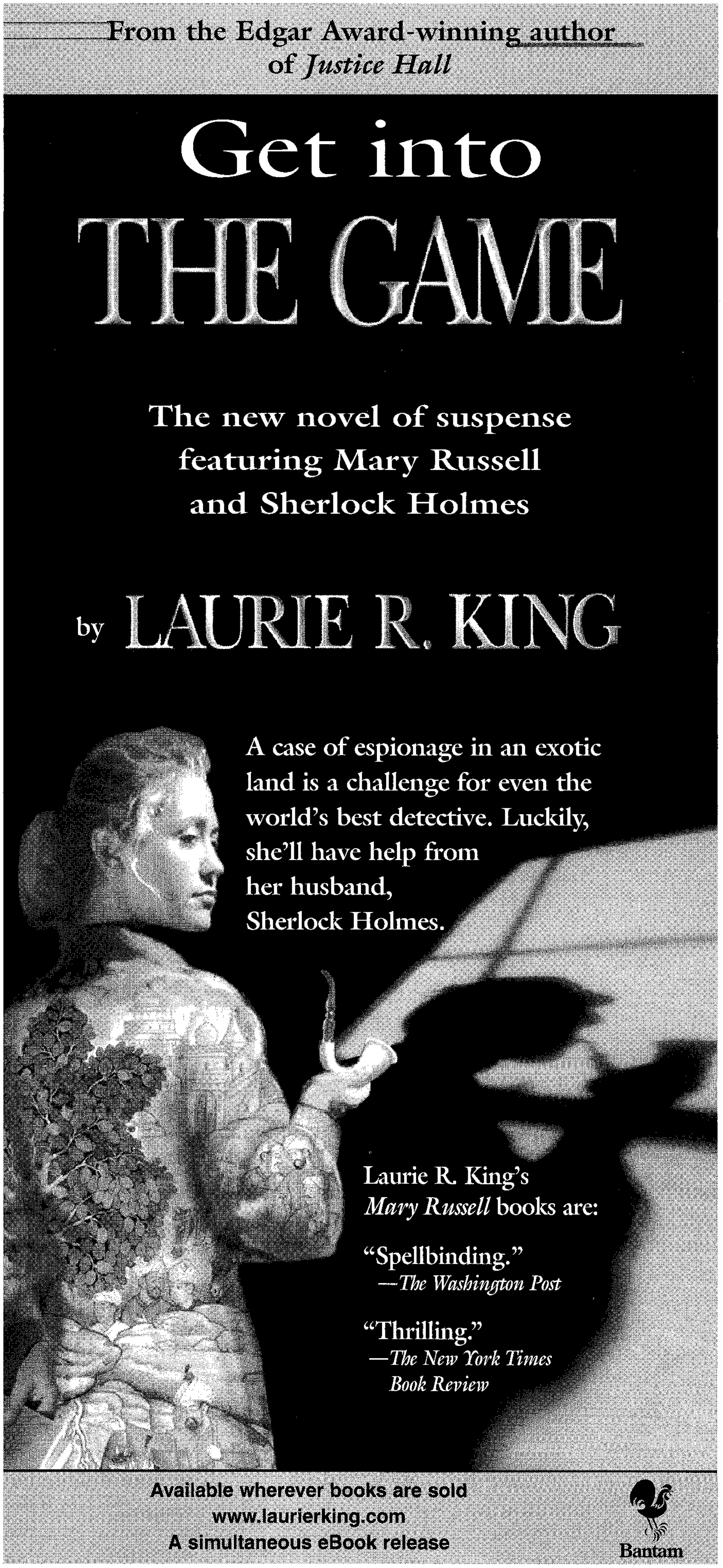
ing winged goddesses down green roads. After my mother died, I did not keep these homemade art works. I was unable, during the long days while my sister and I sorted and packed our mother's belongings and disposed of her furniture, to imagine ever wanting to see again those crude expressions of her faith in self-help and magic. The collages have been lost. Words were inscribed on them, words about peace and happiness, but I do not remember what those words were.

The kimono fell on my mother to a place just below her hips. Its antennae rose in the air behind her head, and drew attention to her hair, which looked brushed to appear as if it had not been brushed at all, then hurriedly sprayed in place. She had on glasses whose frames were big and buglike; combined with the antennae and the wings, the effect was almost comical. Because I knew that I had no choice other than to approve, I told her that the kimono was amazing, and she asked me if I truly thought so, and I said, "Yes, yes, absolutely."

I imagine her turning, showing me the back, like a lover displaying a dress that delivers a frank promise of sex. And it occurs to me that the butterfly was a parasite—that its wings were too small to lift and carry both her and all the things attached to the robe, the sachets and the man in the moon and the feathers and jewels hanging from ribbons and strings. When I see her this way, in memory, with the indigo and blue sashes dangling beneath her arms, and the cat like a badge over her heart, and her antennae sticking up behind her head, I become grateful to her father, who, however he may have failed her when she was a little girl, protected her and insured her a home in the last years of her life.

In the seventies, my mother made a suit for my father. We were living in Coconut Grove at the time, in a house that had formerly been inhabited by a C.I.A. agent. The suit was handmade in the traditional manner, with recurrent fittings leading to the drawing and redrawing of patterns, and the painstaking construction of a paper-and-muslin facsimile. In proper tailoring, enormous labor is expended before the valuable fabric—in this case, a dark-brown wool



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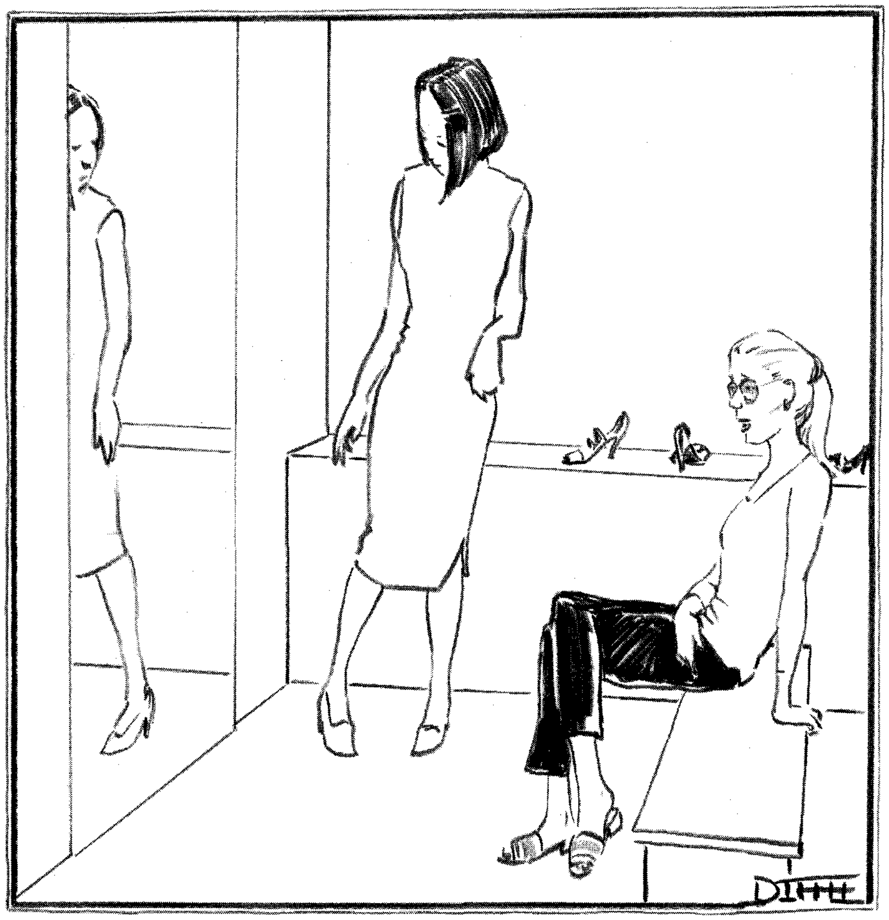


"You know what I think—if the shoe exists, buy it."

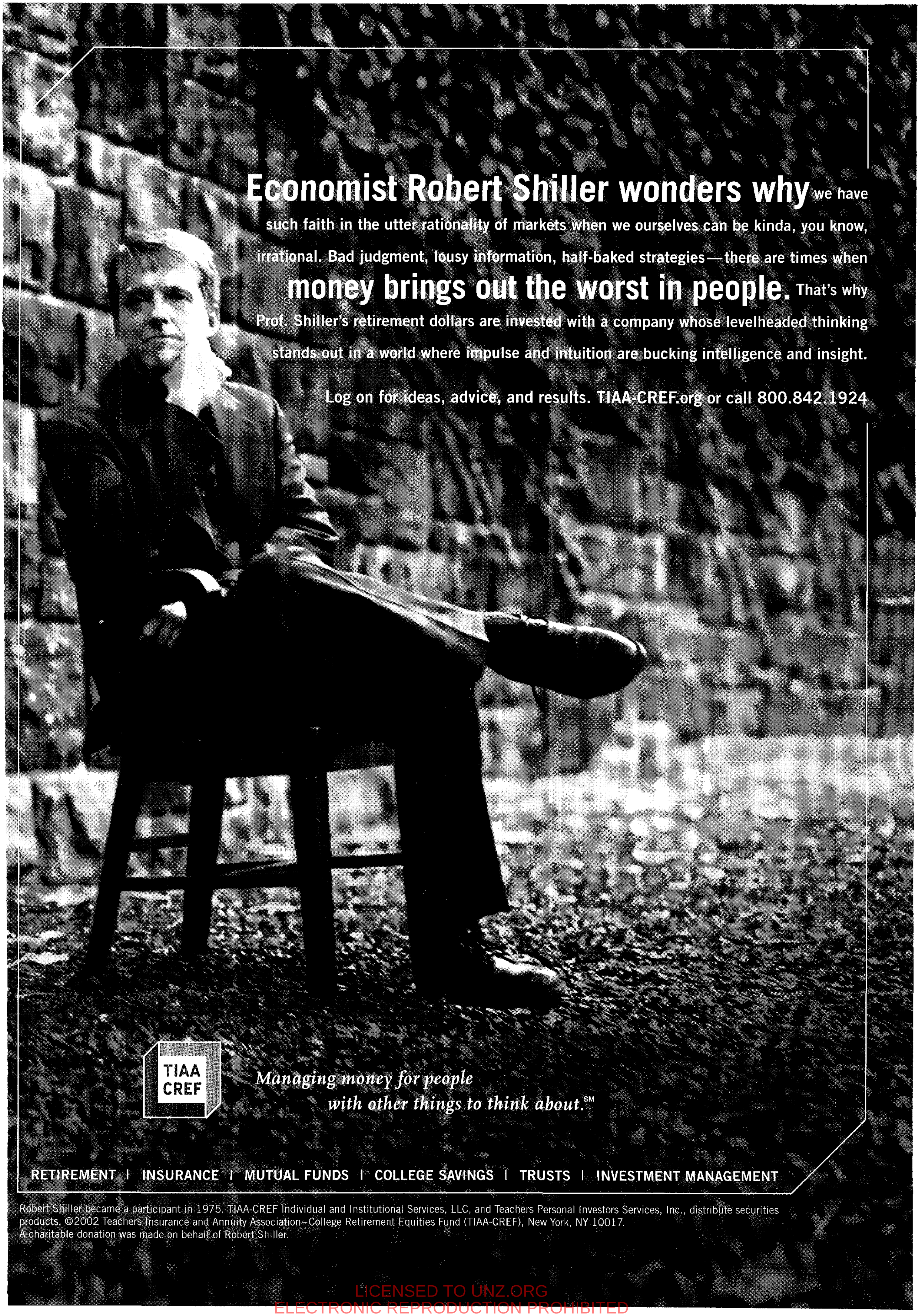
herringbone from a Scottish mill—is ever cut. The tailor observes the posture, mannerisms, and physical idiosyncrasies of the man who will wear the finished garment. Subtle information about social standing, power, and ambition is communicated through the wearer's bearing, and through choices in material and style: pinstripes or plaids; notched lapels or peaked; side vents or center; and so on. The tailor indeed takes the measure of the man, who begins to feel the pride that comes with wearing clothes cut and sewn specifically for his body, clothes intended to carry him into the world as a confident and vital participant in society.

The suit my mother made for my father was impeccable. He told me that he wore it until he wore it out. My mother's skill as a tailor is evident in all the clothes she ever made. Yet when it comes to the apparel she championed as wearable works of art—and tried without success to market as her Peace Goods line—there remains the problem of power. The power of my mother's robe is the power that was strongest in her at the end of her life. This was her power to force away the people she loved. There is beauty in the robe, as there was beauty in my mother, who, when young, was lively and playful and striking to look at, and who even in her worst sickness never lost her ability to laugh. But it is likely, for a person newly confronted with her kimono, that the naked innocence it reveals will defy empathy. When this happens, the conversation among the maker, the wearer, and the viewer of clothes, the conversation open to all of us, simply through living in a world where people get dressed, will be interrupted.

A last consideration. Whatever I or anyone else happens to think of my mother's garments, our feelings and opinions should not, in the end, serve to judge or condemn what might have been, for their designer, their paramount virtue. That she knew so thoroughly her craft and the traditions of fashion, and that she went on to make, in her final decade, such declaratory yet impenetrable clothes, such odd things to wear, gives—in light of her scornful retreat from people and the public world—a supreme, unexpected dignity to her creations. I realize now, as I did not before she died, that, however violent or delusional she may have been when I was growing up, she was, after all, working. She was smoking and drinking herself into her grave, yet she was managing, in her classrooms at the college, and in her shop near the river, and in her house at the bottom of the road, to carry on and endure. "Death? Or life?" the kimono seems to ask. Because the appliquéd symbols that form these questions are so appropriate to the idea of ceremony and pageantry, and yet so childlike and puzzling, the viewer looks away from the garment and considers the wearer. But my mother in her robe is nowhere to be found. Her inner life has been removed to the surface of the kimono.

My mother lived her life inviting death. When her cancer was diagnosed, and she was summarily ordered by her doctors to quit smoking, she did so in a matter of days, and seemed afterward rarely to think of smoking, or to regret that she ever had. Smoking had got her to the one place where the major competing strains in her consciousness of herself—as a visionary child and as a brokenhearted woman—came together, and made her whole, and left her to die in peace.

Years after her death, my worry over her persists. Worry may be what I am trying to overcome when I talk to my dead mother, as I did that recent evening in the stairwell at the New York Public Library. I was brooding over some problem that had existed between us, and sharing with her, out loud (though not too loudly), my thoughts. On the first-floor landing, I briefly imagined her floating near the ceiling. Stitched onto her silk kimono were provisions and companions for her winged journey into eternity. "Mom!" I said, and, as I called out to her, I did not glance over my shoulder, and I did not, in that passing instant, dare to see, at a modest height above the ground—my mother, not there. ♦



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PROFILES

THE DESIGNER

Miuccia Prada has a doctorate in political science. She calls herself a feminist. "I make clothes. It's silly. But it's my job."

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Last month, ten days before Miuccia Prada was scheduled to present her collection of women's clothing for the 2004 fall season in Milan, she began, in her own words, to "freak out." The day before, she had been relaxed, amiable, and entertaining. She had even dressed with her customary eccentricity: lime-green skirt, mauve cashmere cardigan, short black socks, and a pair of fringed brown wingtips so cumbersome that they seemed like something only a nun or a golfer would wear. Or Miuccia Prada. By the time she got to her office the next morning, her mood had shifted. It was Valentine's Day—and her seventeenth wedding anniversary, as a matter of fact—but there were no roses, chocolates, or champagne in sight, just bottled water, a plate of sliced oranges, and a lot of coffee. Her husband, Patrizio Bertelli, the demanding and theatrical Tuscan who is the chief executive of the global group of companies that bears the Prada family name, had left early on his Lear jet to attend to the production of shoes at one of their factories near Florence. I asked if she was sorry that she would have to spend their anniversary without him. "Are you kidding?" she replied. "Thank God he is gone. Because he would have ideas. And, right now, if he told me what he thought I would kill him."

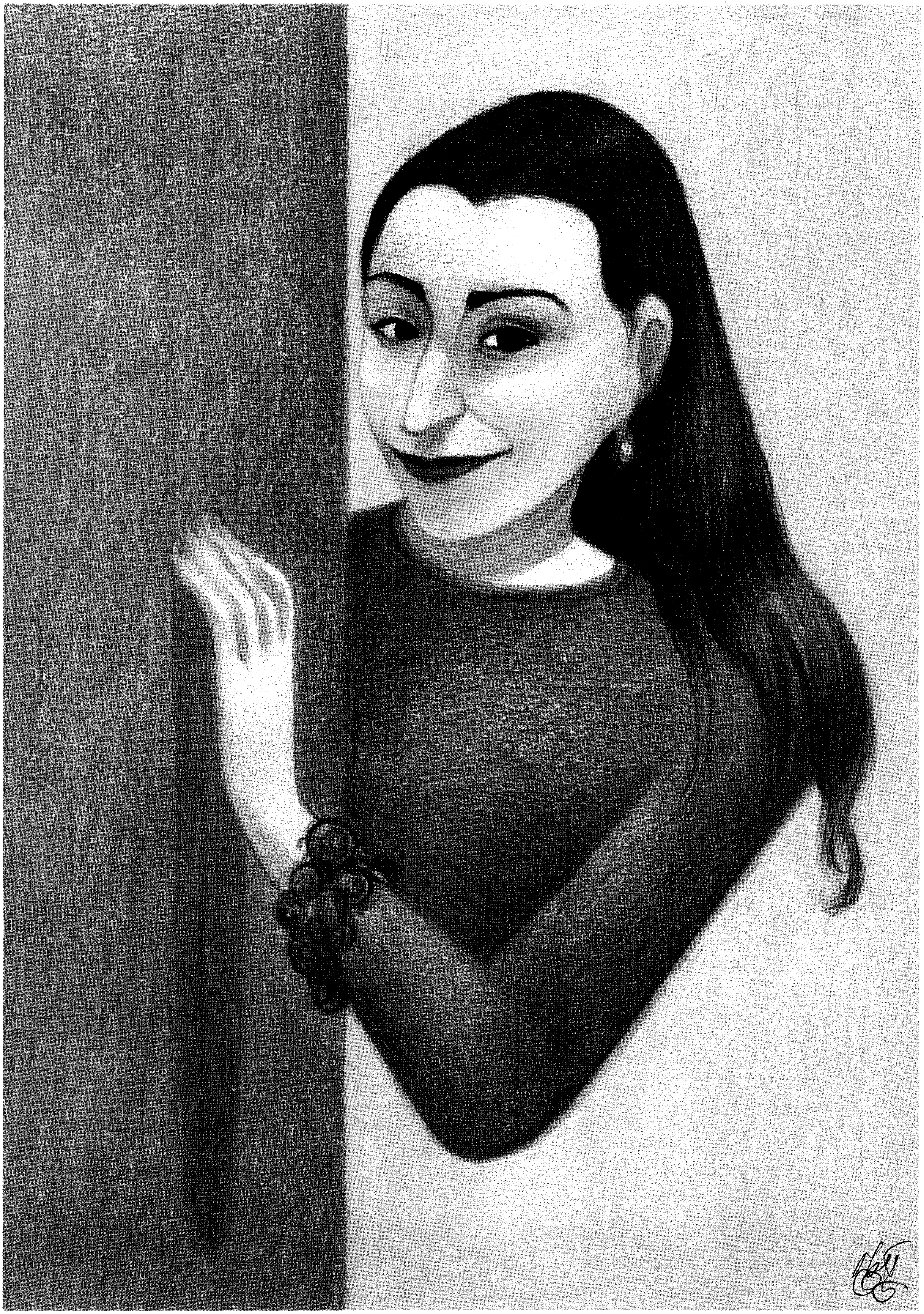
Prada was struggling, as she often does, to balance the commercial requirements of a giant international corporation with her idiosyncratic aesthetic goals. "I want to rule the world," she told me once, not completely in jest. "I want the name Prada to be huge. But also I want to make what I want to make and what I want to wear." It is almost impossible to be both avant-garde and immensely successful, and Prada knows that; but she insists on trying. "We are completely stuck," she said at one point in the afternoon. "Nothing is working out. Not the shapes of the collars or the silhouettes or the fabrics or the colors. Nothing. They don't even look like clothes. In my head, I have a very clear idea of what I want, but my ideas don't seem to match with reality and I don't know what to do." Nearly every season since 1988, when she introduced her first line of women's clothing, Prada has shown an astonishing ability to create trends: it began with a black bag made of industrial nylon and trimmed in leather—a simple purse that acquired a cult following and, eventually, helped launch a multibillion-dollar conglomerate. Since then, she has brought out military clothes that set off a trend for utilitarian chic; slingback Sabrina heels that caused one sensation and oversized wedges that caused another; and, in 2000, an updated, deeply coveted thousand-dollar version of a bowling bag. In each case, she managed to convert a private obsession with things like kitsch, uniforms, and wallpaper into an international symbol of cool.

This year, Prada was inspired by computers and by the idea of "exploring the boundary of what is real and what is virtual"—an increasingly serious pursuit for her. She had spent hours peering at video games, examining how the characters were dressed and how they moved; then she used prints and photographs to blur the distinctions between them. But she still had to turn it all into clothes. "They need to be fashionable"—a word she hates—"and commercial, too," she said. "This is where I really suffer. Because there are three basic questions I have to ask myself: Do I like the clothes? Will they sell? And are they new? They are very different questions, and I can almost never seem to match them up. Look at the coat I was just working on"—a tartan trenchcoat cut from green, orange, and purple wool and trimmed in fur. "From a selling point, I know perfectly well what people will want. If I try to turn this into something that is possibly nice to wear, it will come out banal. Because usually what's nice to wear is banal. And this is my problem. Do I make the clothing people want or the clothing I think they ought to wear?"

All day, she had been in her workroom, on the top floor of the Prada headquarters, on Via Bergamo. A harsh sun cut through the wall of windows, and after three frustrating hours she took a break and walked next door to her office, which—like the rest of the building—is crafted from the school of icy Nordic modernism: no chintz sofas or inviting fireplaces, just polished cement and exposed plumbing. Dozens of books were piled neatly on a black table, and rows of ceramics sat on a windowsill. The walls, painted an industrial ochre, were empty, the floor an unbroken expanse of concrete. The wastepaper basket—also with nothing in it—was black; so were the tables and chairs. There are no family snapshots (she has two teen-age sons)—in fact, no personal touches at all. A work of art by Carsten Höller protruded from the middle of the floor. At first glance, it looks like a horrendous construction error, or a particularly wide trash chute placed in the most inconvenient location possible; actually, it's a slide that snakes along the building's three floors and empties into a courtyard outside. There are safety pads on the floor for anyone who is willing to give it a try.

Prada had been carrying on an endless discussion of pleats (yes or no, how big, where will they fall), faille, and the possibilities of computer-generated design. Her design director, Fabio Zambernardi, was by her side, as he has been for more than fifteen years. (Before that, he worked as a jeweller, then attended dental school.) As she talked, Zambernardi drew. Shoes, collars, dresses. The height of a waist, the length of a skirt. They debated the heft of a cashmere-wool blend that she wanted to use in

LORENZO MATTOTTI

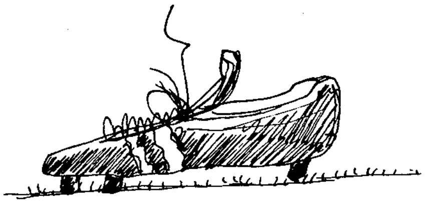


a dress. "I like heavy fabrics," she said to me at one point. "Fabio is against." She wanted a long, low arch to a high-heeled pump; he wanted it sharper and higher. It went on like that all day. At one point, she was informed that the factory would not deliver clothes for three more days. "Why?" she asked plaintively, and instructed an assistant to phone a foreman. No answer. "My God, where are they?" she muttered. "It's ten days before a show and they aren't working?" She turned back to staring dolefully at textiles printed in what seemed like psychedelic versions of television-test patterns. After a while, she looked up and whispered, "You know what? This time, I think we could really have something like a complete, total disaster."

She saw me roll my eyes. "I have a kind of complex of this work being superficial and dumb," she said. "It's my personal drama. Not the world's. Everyone who is smart says they hate fashion, that it's such a waste of time. I have asked many super-serious people, 'Then why is fashion so popular?' Nobody can answer that question. But *somebody* must be interested, because when I go to the stores the people are there. Thousands of them. So I have grown tired of apologizing for being in this profession." She went on, "I know that clothes are not important, that I am not changing society. I am just doing my work as well as I can. And right now I want this collection to succeed. So today I am having a crisis. And why? Because I can't match a dress with a pair of shoes. I am embarrassed to say that. But in the end I cannot forget what I do. I make clothes. It's silly. But it's my job."

Miuccia Prada doesn't sew, embroider, or knit. I never saw her sketch a skirt or a shoe, nor is she likely to pick up a pair of scissors and cut out a dress. She is famous, perhaps above all, for her stylish and expensive footwear—which is as much in demand in Tokyo as in Manhattan or Moscow. Several years ago, the company constructed a factory near Florence so modern that it looks like a greenhouse, yet not once since then has she visited the workrooms there. She is not that kind of designer. Instead, she surrounds herself with talented people whose job is to translate her themes, concepts, and—especially—her taste into clothes that bear the Prada name. Often, she will focus on a color, a texture, a memory; in the mid-nineties, for example, it was trash. ("I was obsessed by trash, that trashy seventies feeling. Bad taste—I loved it.") Once she locks in her seasonal passion, she can tell her people what to do and show them how to do it.

It is an unusual approach, but it has made her one of the most influential designers in the world, and one of the most powerful women in Europe. If Giorgio Armani is Milan's Volkswagen, then Miuccia Prada is its Mercedes. She makes clothes for rich people, but she has turned an alternative aesthetic—slightly frumpy, somewhat feminist—into an international business that now owns controlling interests in the companies of such high-end designers as Azzedine Alaïa, Jil Sander, and Helmut Lang, among others. It's not easy to take a thrift-store sensibility and marry it to a five-thousand-dollar snakeskin trenchcoat. But anyone who has wandered into one of Prada's hundred and sixty-five stores—the walls painted identically, in minty shades of green—would have to acknowledge that she has changed the way that many people think about clothes. "The name 'Prada' has come to represent a new way of expressing style," Lawrence Steele, a Milan-based designer who was one of her earliest assistants, told me. "Is it ugly? Is it retro? Is it incredibly cool? Nobody really knows, but everyone is afraid to be wrong. Miuccia's clothes are certainly not for everyone. It's like a radio wave. You have to be able to tune into that frequency. But if you get what she is doing, then you want to buy them. Because nobody else is making anything like that."



Prada is not after women's bodies; what she wants is their brains. She doesn't make clothes that are aggressively vulgar, like Donatella Versace, or staid, repetitive classics, like Armani. Nor does she make anything particularly revealing, like John Galliano or Tom Ford. Her clothes can be odd and, she concedes, at times even purposefully ugly. She once

TO THE FORTY-THIRD PRESIDENT

Hip deep in the pit, wading through ruins
of that border state where the mind narrows
and will not be broadened by hope,
I hear your strong victorious voice
and almost believe love of country
will be enough to right old wrongs,
pity the poor and avert war,
but then the soft-pedalling language resumes,
you lick your lips nervously,
veering toward arrogance,
and my head aches all over again.
What I see are tactical endurance,
rhetoric divorced from practice and aversion
squatting on a shaky platform.

When you place your hand on the Bible,
do you think about eternal questions:
Why are we here instead of nothing?
Does love make us who we are?
Do we survive death? Like Jesus,
my father's people were sprinkled on their foreheads;
they farmed peaches and tobacco.

My mother's people fled invading armies
of Romans, Persians, and Turks.
Can a few like you lead us all?
Waving from your droning black helicopter
at the cheering hordes, fixing your gaze
on some mythical past, can you see
time battering the surface of Earth?

Can you see sorrow is egalitarian?
Or the hairy leg of Satan planted firmly
in poverty, where the birth of suffering
supersedes the birth of perfect children?
Nature seems complacent
as hate rains down on us in swoops.
Why does God make man to feel it?
Part of me, the real red-bloodedness,
open, drinking in the night, hates something vaguely, too,
and is frightened, staring out at the night grass,
where, when the moon breaks out for a minute,
steam rises from ropes of excrement
spurted out by some unbroken animal
circling in the dark wood.

—*Henri Cole*

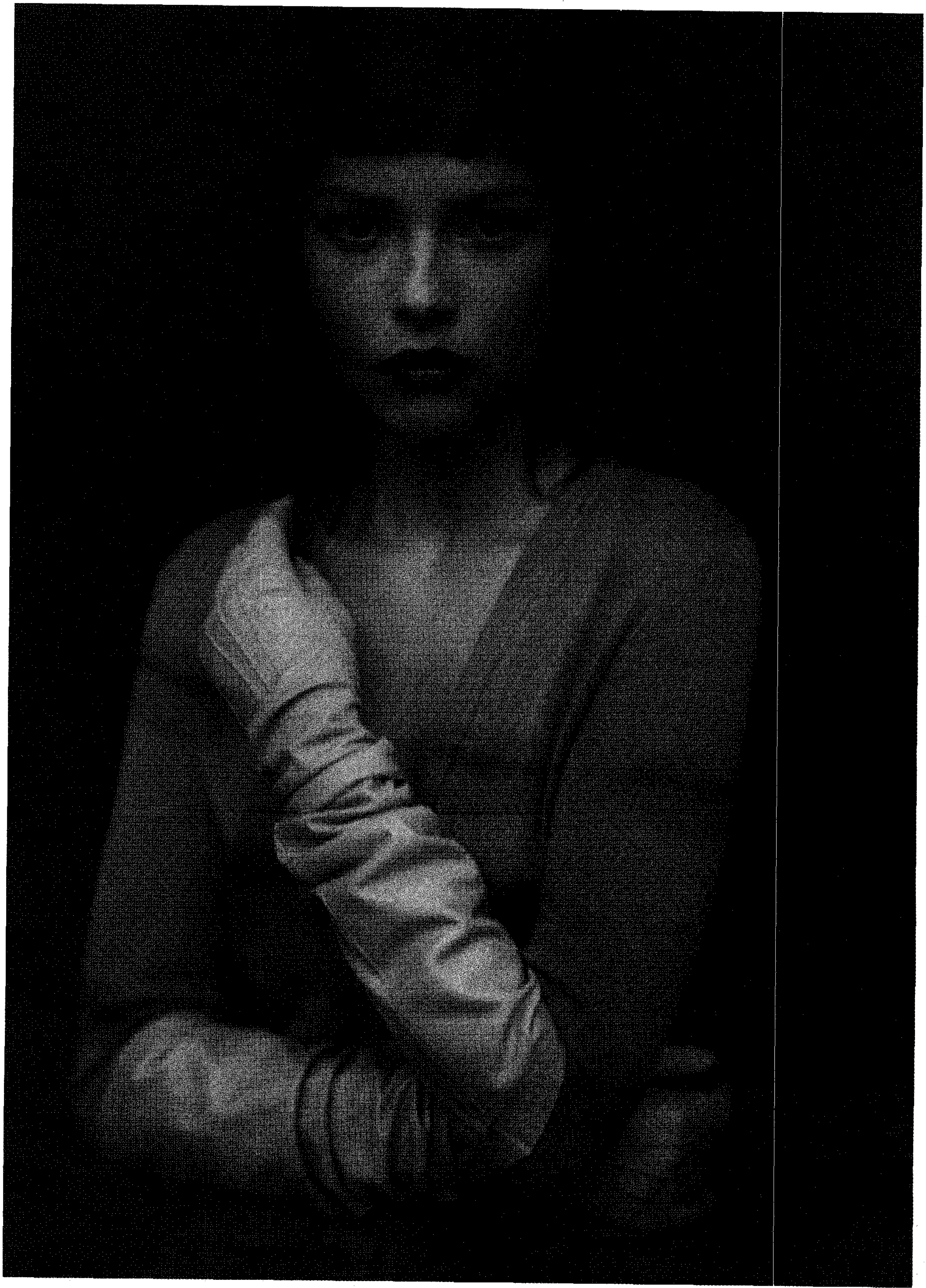
said about beauty that "when the clothes do not reveal, it gives you the freedom to reveal your mind." Recently, she told me, "I don't want my women to look like a caricature. Simple as that. They say my clothes have to be sexy. Yes, I suppose. But for me the goal is to be sexy in a different way, and that is not so easy. To be honest, what interests me more and more is the idea of what is real and what is unreal. What is beauty and what is fake? I'm wondering if we even can tell anymore."

Prada herself is a handsome and engaging woman of fifty-three; she is striking, but not beautiful in a conventional way. Though she makes clothes that many people feel can be worn only by the absurdly thin, she herself is not—at least, not the type of thin that is required to wear one of her tight chiffon skirts or restrictively cut sweater sets. She has auburn hair that hangs to her shoulders, and greenish-brown eyes that glisten when she smiles. She has often been described as dowdy, but it's a sexy dowdiness, one she has managed to bottle and brand. More than anything else, whether she is dressed in a plain gray suit with enormous antique diamonds dangling from her ears, or a tie-dyed cotton dress, a man's sweater, a neck full of costume jewelry, and astonishingly expensive purple crocodile shoes, Prada has her own style, and she doesn't understand women who don't. "What all these actresses wear to the Academy Awards now—it's just dresses," she told me one evening. "They have no personality. You rarely see them think about it. It's as if women were afraid to explore who they are anymore. Now, how can that be sexy? Watch them. Look at Nicole Kidman. She is beautiful, and she is nice. But sexy?" Prada shook her head sadly. "A zero." She herself has turned a search for a different kind of glamour into a fetish. That's what her February show was about. It is also behind her new advertising campaign, photographed by Steven Meisel, which features a series of waxy-looking models staring vacantly at the camera: they might be real—or they might belong in Madame Tussaud's. Who can tell?

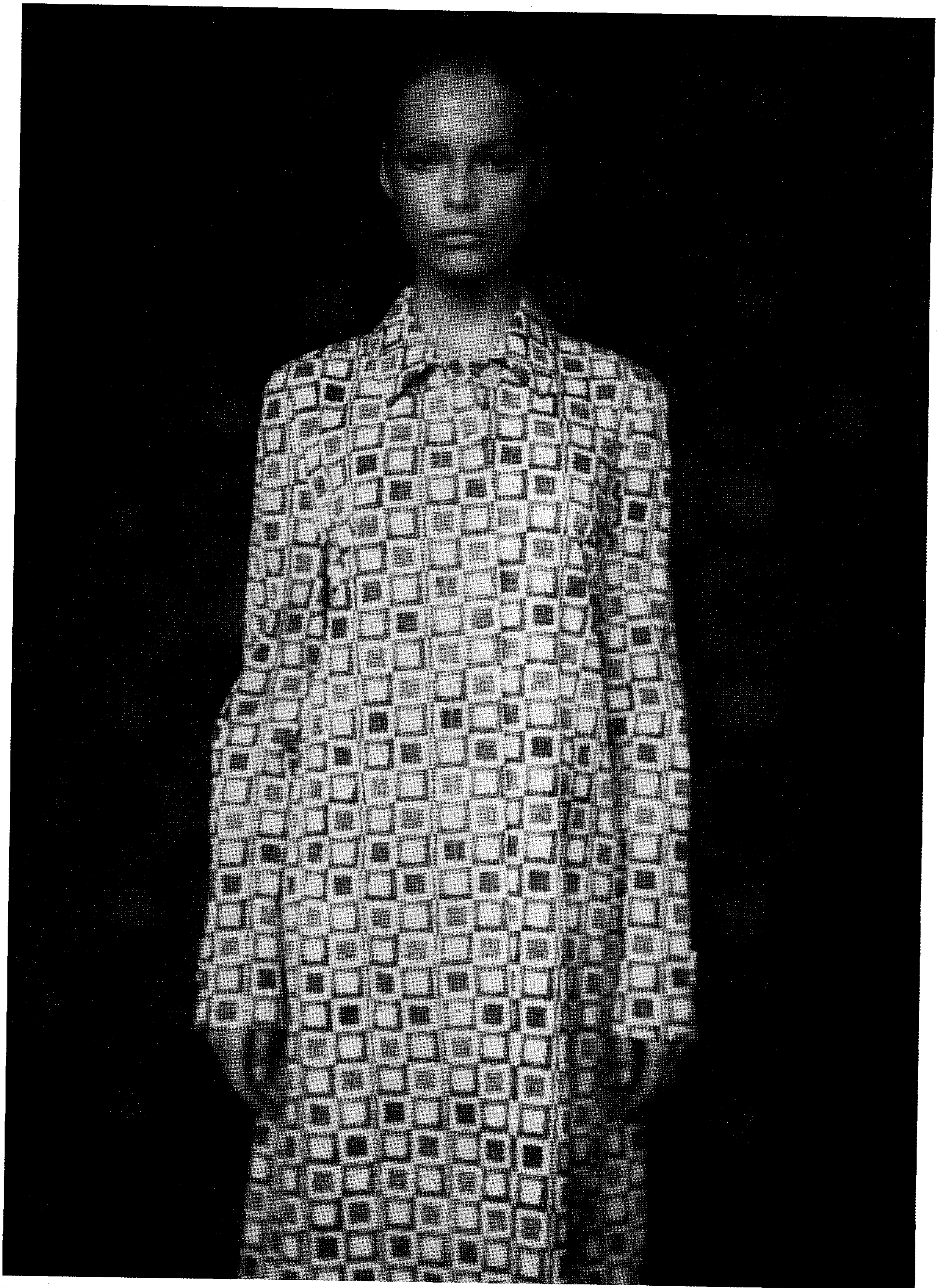
Prada has always been in love with clothes, but it never occurred to her that she should make them for a living. Her paternal grandfather, Mario, opened a leather-goods store in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, in Milan, in 1913, and within five years he had been appointed by the Italian royal family to make valises, trunks, and cases from leather, walrus, alligator, and other exotic materials. That first shop is now the main Prada store—and a regal reminder of the family's heritage of craftsmanship. The most beautiful items there—ivory-handled walking sticks, tortoiseshell brushes, beauty cases made from elephant skin—are not even for sale. Although her grandfather's greatest days as a merchant were over by the Second World War, Miuccia has been exposed to luxury as a way of life since the day she was born. ("Even now, my mother will grab a dress I make and rub it and say, 'This silk is horrible. It's nothing your grandfather would even have been willing to sell. Can't you do better than this?' ")

Prada says that her childhood was dull. Her parents were typically severe, and she was severely bored. By the age of fifteen, she, like so many middle-class kids in the sixties, had begun to rebel. "I was always frustrated, because I had to dress so seriously. I was a proper young girl and I was *dreaming* of pink shoes, red shoes, pink dresses. Anything with color. Exciting underwear. Everybody had this kind of dull underwear and wore boring striped dresses. I couldn't stand it." She began to dress in an eccentric—even bizarre—manner. "I would wear Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin, and then some strange English clothes, all in a weird way. I always had to be first. That was the most important thing. I also loved uniforms, and I still do. You can hide yourself in a uniform; you can conceal who you are. Sometimes I like to hide myself behind formality. I think it's attractive."

She enrolled at the University of Milan, and eventually received a doctorate in political science. Much has been made of the fact that she joined the Communist Party, but in the sixties it was almost a rite of passage for thousands of young middle-class Italians. At protests, she would turn up looking a little different from the other revolutionaries, however: she refused to wear jeans, preferring high heels and vintage dresses, which she found in thrift shops. "I hated the bourgeois people who felt they had to dress in jeans when you



Cardigan and leather opera gloves from the Prada 2000 spring/summer collection. Photographs by Paolo Roversi.



Patterned gabardine coat in brown and acid green from the 1996 spring/summer collection.

knew they didn't want to," she said. I asked her if jeans had ever been a staple of her wardrobe. She answered, "I owned one pair, once, in the eighties, by Fiorucci." After she got her Ph.D., she took an unexpected turn: she began training to become a mime at Milan's Piccolo Teatro. "In those years, you had *to do everything* kind of strange," she recalled. She was a shy young woman, and it was the perfect profession—providing a guaranteed excuse for her silence. "A friend of mine had a sister who did it, so I went to the theatre and I loved it. I was there for five or six years. I got very serious, and I was a really good mime—especially when it was abstract. It's fun controlling your body. I was curious of so many things." Her career ended abruptly when her parents finally forbade her to continue. She was obstinate, but still a good Catholic girl who was not about to break with her family over a life in the theatre.

Feminism became Prada's next fixation, and even today her ambivalence about the role women play in society is obvious. She always felt that a career in fashion would be demeaning. (Elaine Showalter, a professor emeritus of English at Princeton who has written prominently on fashion history, points out that it is a common view among feminists and intellectual women. "They are all leery of the whole fashion world and scared of being associated with it," she says. "It's supposedly frivolous, it's vain, it's focussed on the externals rather than the internals. For many women, it's hard to get beyond that feeling of guilt at doing something they enjoy so much.") By the early nineteen-seventies, though, Prada needed money, so she went to work where she could find a job—in the family store. "I never liked my work in theory, but I loved it in practice," she told me. "And still I am not one hundred per cent happy, and probably the reason I do all these other things is that I want to escape the cruelty and banality of what I do. But I like it, too. I have to say that. I really do love my work."

One day in 1978, at a trade fair in Milan, Prada met Bertelli. He owned a leather factory in Tuscany, and was producing what she considered to be cheap knockoffs of her bags. He was belligerent, endlessly argumentative, and as arrogant as any man she had ever met. They hit it off immediately. "He had all these ideas about what I should do with my business," she said, laughing. (By this time, her mother had persuaded her to take over the store.) He told her that she should have greater ambitions. She had her doubts, but gave him the exclusive license to manufacture Prada leather goods. In 1987, after living together for eight years, they were married. "He has been pushing me ever since," she said, not unhappily. "I wanted at first to do only bags. But the company—and by that I mean my husband—insisted I make shoes. And when I said no he would say, 'O.K., we will do it without you.' And I don't like that, so I had to do it myself. That became the system. He will say, 'It's time to start a men's line,' and I will say no. He would go get somebody else to do it, and I couldn't stand that, so I would take over." In 1993, she launched her secondary line, Miu Miu (it's her nickname). With Miu Miu, Prada allows herself to be more experimental, even whimsical. The same year, she began to sell men's clothes. In 1997, she introduced a line of sportswear. "I am egotistical, so in the end he knows I will do the work," she said. "If I could, I would make every single piece myself. Bertelli was right. I would have been bored only doing bags."

When Prada and Bertelli latch on to a subject, they don't dabble. Their art collection—with works by Brice Marden, Damien Hirst, Walter De Maria, and many others—is considered among the most important contemporary collections in Italy. Bertelli tends toward the modern classics, like Stella and Rothko, and his office, near Arezzo, is filled with recent work by Italian artists. It was Prada who bought a large metal escape vehicle created by the American installation artist Andrea Zittel. (It sits prominently in her living room and looks quaintly futuristic, like something George Jetson might have driven to work.) Ten years ago, neither of them knew much about modern art. "Art for me was school education—nothing major," Prada said. "But we had a huge immersion. Meeting artists, reading and studying. It went on for three or four years—I can't remember how long—until we felt we understood something." It also led, in 1995, to the establishment of the Fondazione Prada, an exhibition space in Milan that houses a growing collection of contemporary art. "Again, it happened by chance. We had some friends who were artists. And one said, 'Ah, this is a fantastic space for sculpture.' And I said that would be a good idea, and my husband said, 'Fine, let's do it.' He is much more concrete than I am, so it was done." Since then, the foundation's director, Germano Celant, an art critic who also serves as senior curator of contemporary art at the Guggenheim in New York, has put on a series of shows by artists ranging from the British sculptor Marc Quinn to Dan Flavin and Anish Kapoor. Prada insists that her love of contemporary art is personal and has nothing to do with her day job. "I laugh when they talk about fashion as art," she says. "It's ridiculous. When I buy art, I want to keep it separate. You don't want people to think you are doing what you are doing because you want to make your company better."

It is hard to know, however, where personal obsessions end and the desire to sell the world an increasing percentage of its luxury goods begins. Like Ralph Lauren, Prada offers far more than clothes; she is trying to sell people a better, hipper version of themselves. She doesn't simply sell five-hundred-dollar scarves (or thirty-eight-thousand-dollar chinchilla blankets); she sells the world view that comes with buying such objects. Bertelli and Prada love art and collect it for the pleasure it gives them; but their life style fuels the image of cultivated luxury that they retail to more than sixty countries. Bertelli is also an avid sailor. In 2000, after he invested more than fifty million dollars, his boat, the Luna Rossa, reached the finals of the America's Cup. Since then, the Luna Rossa and its pursuits have captured the imagination of Italy (but not that of Bertelli's wife, who shakes her head in mock mourning when the subject is mentioned). It has also, of course, pushed the Prada name (and its red striped sport logo) to places in the world where it had hardly been uttered before.

The couple's latest, and perhaps most significant, enthusiasm is for architecture. In the last few years, Prada and

Bertelli have spent more than a hundred and twenty million dollars on two major stores, in New York and Tokyo—they refer to them as "epicenters." The New York store, on lower Broadway, in SoHo, was designed by the controversial Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. The one in Tokyo was designed by the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. It cost about eighty million dollars to build, which represents the single largest investment that Italy has made in Japan since the Second World War, and has become one of Japan's most provocative public spaces.

Wool bustier and beetle brooch from the 1999 fall/winter collection.

Prada and Bertelli don't see these epicenters merely as stores; they prefer to describe them as attempts to place shopping in a modern cultural context. Depending on your point of view, it's either a visionary assessment or pretentious. Bertelli considers shopping—he prefers the word "consumerism"—a sort of religion for many people in the age of globalism, a defining cultural activity. "It's a new language, a new form of society, a way of communicating that is now central to human life in many places," Bertelli says. Koolhaas doesn't go quite that far. "Shopping used to be an autonomous entity with its own metabolism," he says. "But over the past twenty years it has infiltrated almost every other activity known to man. Airports, churches, universities—it has become impossible to disentangle and separate the fate of these entities from shopping. They support each other, and you don't know where one ends and the other begins."

That is certainly true in the vast space of the New York store. It would be hard not to regard the twenty-two-thousand-square-foot building as at least something of a monument to the Prada empire. After all, it has an area called the "aura," with a series of screens known as the "ubiquitous display" (at the moment, it is showing loops of scenes from a shopping mall in China). Metal cages, which the staff refers to as "the hanging city," hold merchandise. There are also magic mirrors, dressing-room doors that become opaque on demand, and radio-frequency identification tags, so that the history of any article of clothing can be traced, then viewed by the customer on a dressing-room monitor. I asked Prada how one is to regard such a space, which, despite all the talk of artistic community, exists principally to sell clothes. She acknowledged that it would be stupid to pretend that egos weren't attached to an undertaking so ambitious. "But we had such important spaces that we felt we had to use them," she told me. "Also, we were a little fed up with our stores. I was bored. One evening, we sat down to decide who should do it. And Bertelli"—she almost never calls him anything else—"said, 'Let's take out the books, and perhaps we will see something that looks exciting.' I picked out the work of Koolhaas. I didn't know him. Or his work. Everyone was suggesting somebody, and nobody suggested him. They said, 'Ah, no, forget it, he is too difficult.' But immediately when somebody is difficult for us it's exciting. So Bertelli said, 'Let's invite him.' And it's been a wonderful collaboration." This summer, another epicenter designed by Koolhaas will open in Los Angeles—at nearly twenty thousand square feet—and they have been discussing a fourth, in Beijing or Shanghai, which would focus on preservation. "You go to Shanghai now, and there are the grand hotels, and there are skyscrapers, and every company is like every other company," Prada said. "It's offensive and painful, and doing a project that is more respectful is one of my goals." In addition, Bertelli told me, China is the next great luxury market and the best possible place to expand their business.

Is all this development art, commerce, or something in between? "Miuccia is trying to keep up with the zeitgeist," Germano Celant told me. "The danger for her in fashion is that if she is too experimental she will lose her clients. With art, she can try new things. But in the end it all fits together: art, fashion, architecture, design—even shopping. It's all theatre, really. A modern spectacle for a modern world."

One particularly cold night a couple of weeks ago, Prada invited me to her apartment for dinner. She lives with her husband and their two sons across from an auto dealership in central Milan, on the ground floor of the building where she was born and raised. Her mother, who is eighty-five, lives upstairs. Her brother and various nieces and nephews occupy apartments in the building, too. Prada tries to separate her work from her private life, and is usually successful; she rarely goes out and spends most nights at home. "I raised two children," she told me. "For fifteen years, that is what I did at night and every free moment. I never travelled. I never went out. Yes, I had it easy—I could switch my work hours around and get help. I could go back home during the work day if I wanted, but definitely I gave up the fun for the children. I don't regret that for one minute. What I did was more valuable to me than any place I could have gone or thing I could have done in those years."

Tie-dyed stretch poplin dress from the 2004 spring/summer collection.

Prada and Bertelli's apartment is large but not lavish. The main room—where they carry out most of their social life—is an airy, modified A-frame that functions as sitting room, living room, dining room, and art gallery. When I arrived, a middle-aged woman was sitting on a couch sipping prosecco. She introduced herself as "Manuela Pavesi, Miuccia's best friend." Then Prada walked in. She was dressed casually, but with care: a brown tie-dyed cardigan over a flouncy black dress, diamond earrings, purple stockings, and Kelly-green silk pumps. "It's just us, the kids, and Manuela," she said to me, smiling. "Bertelli left. He screamed at me because I am trying to diet and I am serving fish. He said you don't want fish. He said you liked meat and red wine. I am serving fish and white wine. He told me the wine I selected is awful, then he went to Florence." She shrugged and sat down on the couch next to her friend. (I had eaten lunch with Bertelli the day before, at one of his favorite restaurants, in a strip mall not far from his office, near Arezzo. We had had steak and a lot of red wine—which Bertelli, as is his custom, chose. Bertelli can seem intimidating; he is a big man, with a hawk's nose, white hair, the frown of an intellectual, and the severe, slightly retro black glasses favored by Italians who take themselves seriously. He is fifty-seven and doesn't appear to have had a moment of self-doubt in his life. He is also surprisingly eager to please. Not long after we arrived at the restaurant, he stormed into the kitchen, inspected the meat, tasted three wines, found one acceptable enough to drink, brought me a glass, and then, reluctantly, sat down. Bertelli's talents as a cook are well known, and normally, I was told by the proprietor, he attempts to prepare the food himself.)

"So tell me about my husband," Prada said, leaning toward me with great interest. "Honestly, I have no idea what he is like." This is a bit of shtick—but it's also, quite possibly, true. Prada and Bertelli have a strange, volcanic relationship, and she admits it freely. So do their friends and many of the people who work for them. Bertelli often checks on Prada's work. "It can be annoying," she said. "But when he puts his hands on a product, I have to admit, it becomes better." Later, she said, "It's a common notion that I am not commercial, that I am too sophisticated. Actually, can I tell you something? I am the most commercial person in this company. Bertelli wants to act like he is, but he often could care less. I want my work to sell."

When I asked Bertelli how their responsibilities were divided, he threw his arms into the air. "I don't know," he joked. "We haven't worked that out yet." Bertelli and Prada have been known to argue so violently that employees have had to dodge the things they throw at each other. And it's not just at work. "They fight like animals," Germano Celant told me. "But they are the perfect complement to each other. She is all intellect and ideas, and he brings it all down to earth." It's obvious that they enjoy each other's company, and even many of their battles, but it's not always pleasant to be there. Once, a few years ago, when a strained business meeting got out of hand—the two disagreed fundamentally about a product—Bertelli erupted, shouting, "I'll piss on your shitty handbags!" They continued fighting for a while, then went home and had dinner.

Prada will often say something bad about Bertelli but almost never fails to add something nice. I once asked her about a highly confrontational comment of his, asserting that fashion houses need salesmen more than they need people like her. "Lots of houses do fine without a creative designer," he said. The comment came in 2000, after Prada bought the company of the perfectionist German designer Jil Sander, who quit soon afterward rather than cut expenses or

HAIR BY YANNICK D'YS; MAKE-UP BY JAMES KALIARDOS

accede to Bertelli's demands. (Last year, in a sign that Bertelli was either maturing or scared, Sander returned.)

The remark was widely regarded as particularly harsh, considering what Bertelli's wife does for a living. "Bertelli wishes that the world were like that," she told me in her office one day. "He hates being dependent on somebody like a designer. So he makes these huge offensive statements. But I don't know what he really thinks. He might be much more complicated than he looks."

Prada's teen-age sons appeared for dinner. They are handsome, polite, and wholly uninterested in eating with adults they don't know. They bolted their food, replied to their mother's inquiries about school with one-syllable words, spoke rapidly to each other in Italian. ("My God, they are supposed to know English. They are learning English." She asked them, "Do you understand *one word*?") Dinner consisted of lobster bisque, grilled sole, potatoes, and radicchio, followed by a rich torte. The wine was good. "This is *not* a diet meal," Pavesi said at one point. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Pavesi and Prada met in 1973. "We were dressed in the same completely strange way," Pavesi said. She was an editor of Italian *Vogue*, then worked for years as a photographer, and these days is employed by Prada. The two share a feminism that is leavened by a strong desire to succeed as wives and mothers. Prada says that it's not easy. "I saw so many women who gave up because of the family—just gave up their lives. You give up and you are killed. Bertelli leaves all the time. I say I want to go to the mountains for a week, and he says I am a horrible mother and a bad wife. He can go to the America's Cup for months, and that is O.K. But me . . ." She trailed off. "To do what you want is an everyday struggle."

Earlier, she told me, "In my private life, as an idea with my husband, I decided that I want maybe sometimes to officially obey and shut up and let him have the last word. To play a certain role. And when that happens I tell him, 'Do you know how much I hate you when I have to do this?' " She returned often to the subject of her role as a woman, a wife, and a mother: "I really believe in the principle of feminism, but I also feel that when it is too tough it makes you give up too many things that you like. So I am trying to retain the pleasure of being a woman. I don't want to give up my independence, but I also don't want to forget to enjoy the feminine part of my life."

She was distressed about how little the young women she knew cared about these issues. "Sometimes I think that the obsession with fashion is just about the desperation of being sexy," she said. "My young assistants come to work and they wear these amazing things. Very provocative. And they are so obsessed about being beautiful and sexy, and they are always alone. And I tell them that the more they dress for sex the less sex they will have. It's so basic, but they don't seem to understand me."

Over dessert and coffee, Prada and Pavesi talked about marriage. "I have often wondered if I would stay with Bertelli just for the children, even if for no other reason," Prada said. "I know a lot of people do that." Pavesi looked shocked. "But it's easy for me to say that," Prada continued, "because in the end things are more good than they're bad. I never get bored, and we respect each other."

Pavesi laughed. "Are you kidding? You are his one great weakness. His Achilles' heel."

Prada grunted, but smiled, too. "He could never find another woman as patient as I am."

"But you are so stubborn," Pavesi replied. "You are impossible."

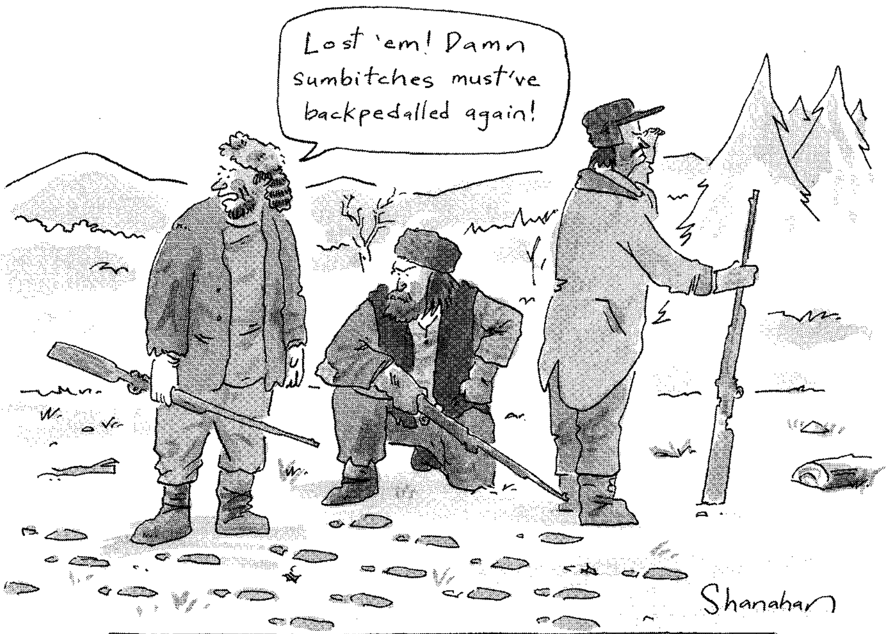
Prada sat silently for a moment and sipped her wine. "I am always checking to see how I feel about my life and my marriage," she said. "I am always asking myself if it's good enough. Is everything the way I want it to be? And the truth is, I have to admit, I may hate him and want to kill him, but late at night when he comes home I am always at least a little bit happy."

The following morning, I met Prada at Linate Airport. We were flying to Dino de Laurentiis's studios, on the outskirts of Rome, so that she could watch the filming of a fake version of a reality-television show funded by her foundation. The "show" was conceived by the young Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli. Vezzoli, who has managed to combine in his work twin passions for cinema and embroidery, will stage the results later this month in Milan, at the foundation. "I don't have time for this today," she said to me as the small jet jumped into the sky. "My collection is in trouble. But how could I miss it?"

Vezzoli likes to play with people's perceptions of themselves. This time, he had chosen the most obvious possible vehicle for that: reality television, which is as popular in Italy today as it is in America. In 1964, the director Pier Paolo Pasolini travelled around Italy and made a documentary called "Comizi d'Amore," or "Love Meetings." In it, he interviewed a wide range of people and asked them about their sexual attitudes; the discussion was extraordinarily frank for that time, and the film lasted only a week in theatres. Vezzoli decided to play on that documentary and to stage a reality-television show called "Comizi di Non Amore," in which young men would audition for the attentions of single women and in the process reveal their feelings about sex and society. Pasolini included famous people—and so did Vezzoli. Nobody involved in the production knew that it was "art," except Prada, Vezzoli, the moderator, and the women who appeared on the show as guest stars: Catherine Deneuve, Marianne Faithfull, Jeanne Moreau, and Antonella Lualdi, an aging Italian actress who appeared in the original film.

The show is essentially a souped-up version of "The Dating Game." Scores of people waited patiently in the audience for hours, hoping to be selected as contestants. Prada sat in the back, beaming. At one point, after three competing men made a particularly heartfelt attempt to win a date—the attempt included a graphic dance by a potential gigolo and a half-dressed woman in thigh-high stiletto boots—Prada turned to me and said, "The trashy part of my soul is completely satisfied. Everyone here thinks this is genuine. We no longer know what is real in our society. So this little subversion is our way of exploring that."

Vezzoli was even more ecstatic. "We have taken it all from Pasolini," he told me. "He called TV interviews the lowest point of humiliation that a human can endure—forty years ago. Pasolini under-


Lost 'em! Damn sumbitches must've backpedalled again!
Shanahan

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

stood even before Warhol where our society was going." Vezzoli paused, and asked, "What would Pasolini hate most if he were alive today? Reality television." Then he glanced at Prada, who was standing in a dressing room with Deneuve. "The idea that Miuccia Prada is producing a reality-TV show subscribing to the real rules of television and also demonstrating its perversity." Vezzoli almost lost his breath. "The fact that the most sophisticated woman in Italy is doing this. It's just incredible."

On the flight home, I asked Prada if there wasn't something a bit sad—maybe even exploitative—about making art based on a hoax, out of what seemed to me the frail lives and dreams of normal humans. "That is what art should be," she said. "The exploration of who we are and what we want to become. Is there ever any other subject?"

Patrizio Bertelli's goal has always been clear: he wants to run the world's most successful luxury-goods house. In the nineteen-eighties, when Prada bags and shoes first gained popularity, Bertelli insisted that if small, high-priced boutiques wanted to receive the accessories that sold so well for them they also had to carry the new line of women's clothing. The strategy prevented many such shops, with their limited display space and tight budgets, from offering the work of competing designers, which was exactly what Bertelli had in mind. Shop owners wanted the shoes and the bags, so they also took the clothes—and Prada elbowed its way onto the shelves of stores throughout Europe and America. At the end of the nineties, when the global economy was sound, the dollar strong, and the luxury market growing rapidly, Bertelli decided to expand again—and to challenge Gucci and L.V.M.H., the global brands best known for luxury goods.

Bertelli went on an international shopping spree, and during the next two years bought major interests in Helmut Lang, Jil Sander, Church's shoes, Azzedine Alaïa, the apparel-maker Genny, and Car Shoe. He also entered into a joint venture with an eyewear manufacturing company, and picked up a twenty-five-per-cent stake in Fendi (which he later sold). The Prada Group is privately owned, so it is not required to release spending figures. But company officials told me that those purchases cost about seven hundred million euros (around nine hundred million dollars at today's exchange rate).

By any reckoning, it was a lot of money. And, like nearly any head of an ambitious private company, Bertelli decided to finance his purchases by selling stock to the public. An offering was planned for September, 2001. The timing could not have been worse. After September 11th, seven-hundred-dollar black sweaters no longer seemed essential. The market for luxury goods all but collapsed. The public offering was withdrawn, and by the end of that year the company's debts—about 1.7 billion euros—roughly equalled its sales. It was not an enviable position for a large company. Since then, the euro has gained in value against the dollar, and that makes European goods particularly expensive for Americans. Prada projects that its net profit will rise more than thirty per cent this year; it's an impressive rate of growth, but the euro is now so strong that earnings will be about the same as last year's. The Prada Group's debts remain, though Bertelli says that they will be cut in half, to less than a billion euros, by the end of this year.

"You should remember that our debt is not due to mismanagement or to management-related losses," he told me. "We did carry out a number of acquisitions, and going public was supposed to help pay for those programs. Nobody was prepared for September 11th." Bertelli again wants to seek money from the most obvious source: the stock market. But he is a famously difficult leader, and many have asked whether he can accommodate a board and the public. Also, both he and his wife focus heavily on the quality of their products—it's one reason they cost so much. I asked him if Prada as a public company could retain its level of craftsmanship, and he replied, in many words, that he didn't see why not.

His wife is not so sure. "It seems that you are not allowed to do anything good except for money," she told me when I asked her about it. "It's funny, when we talk about the stock market with investors, our favorite activities, like the foundation, the big beautiful stores—it looks all wrong to them. You have to demonstrate that they will make money or you have not to do them. That is why I really don't want to go to the stock market. Everything you do has to be immediately profitable. We never built our company that way. Sometimes they ask me to do a bag that sells ten thousand,

and I say, 'You want a bag that sells ten thousand? Do it yourself.' Because that is not how I work. I do the job and, finally, if it's good it will make money. You can't sit there and say it the other way around. If the product is excellent, people will be impressed. If not, everyone will know it."

The next time I saw Prada was the day before the show. Her anxiety had lifted. She looked tired but happy. The workroom behind the cavernous space on the ground floor of the headquarters complex where Prada presents her collections was crowded with seamstresses, assistant designers, models, and technicians. Prada sat with Fabio Zambernardi fine-tuning outfits—ditching a belt here, adding a shawl there, making a model step out of high heels and put on men's shoes instead. ("This is how you take one of the sexiest women in the world and make her the opposite," Prada said to me with a mischievous grin.) At precisely 6 P.M., two stewards appeared with a steam cart full of hors d'œuvres and a chilled bottle of Veuve Clicquot. Prada was the first person at the table. She poured two glasses of champagne and offered one to me. I wondered how she had overcome the crisis that had gripped her just a week earlier. "You mean why did I freak out like that?" she asked, laughing. "Well, the day you are stuck everything seems like a tragedy. You can't see the finished clothes. You are only working with an idea, and so you start to wonder if the idea was any good to begin with. You start to question your talent, you think maybe you are no longer capable of what you could once do.

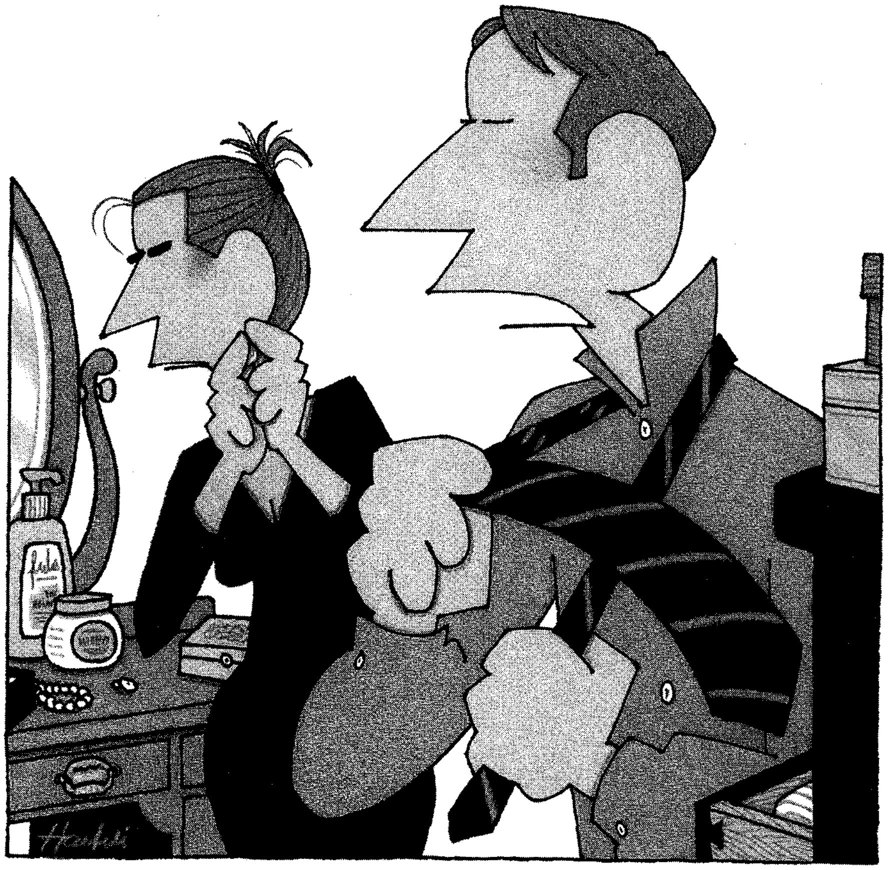
"Then the materials come in, and you realize what you had in mind. I am happy with what I see. It is just what I wanted." Only a week before, her workroom tables had been covered with nothing but sketches and scraps of wool. Now racks of silk dresses printed with computer patterns, wool suits trimmed with jewels, and elaborately stitched fur jackets lined the corridors.

Prada felt that she had managed to combine romantic visions of the past with romantic notions of the future—and to do it in her own quirky way. I asked if she was nervous. "Of course, I am nervous—how can you not be nervous?" she said. "But when my work is good . . ." She stopped herself. "We will just have to wait till tomorrow."

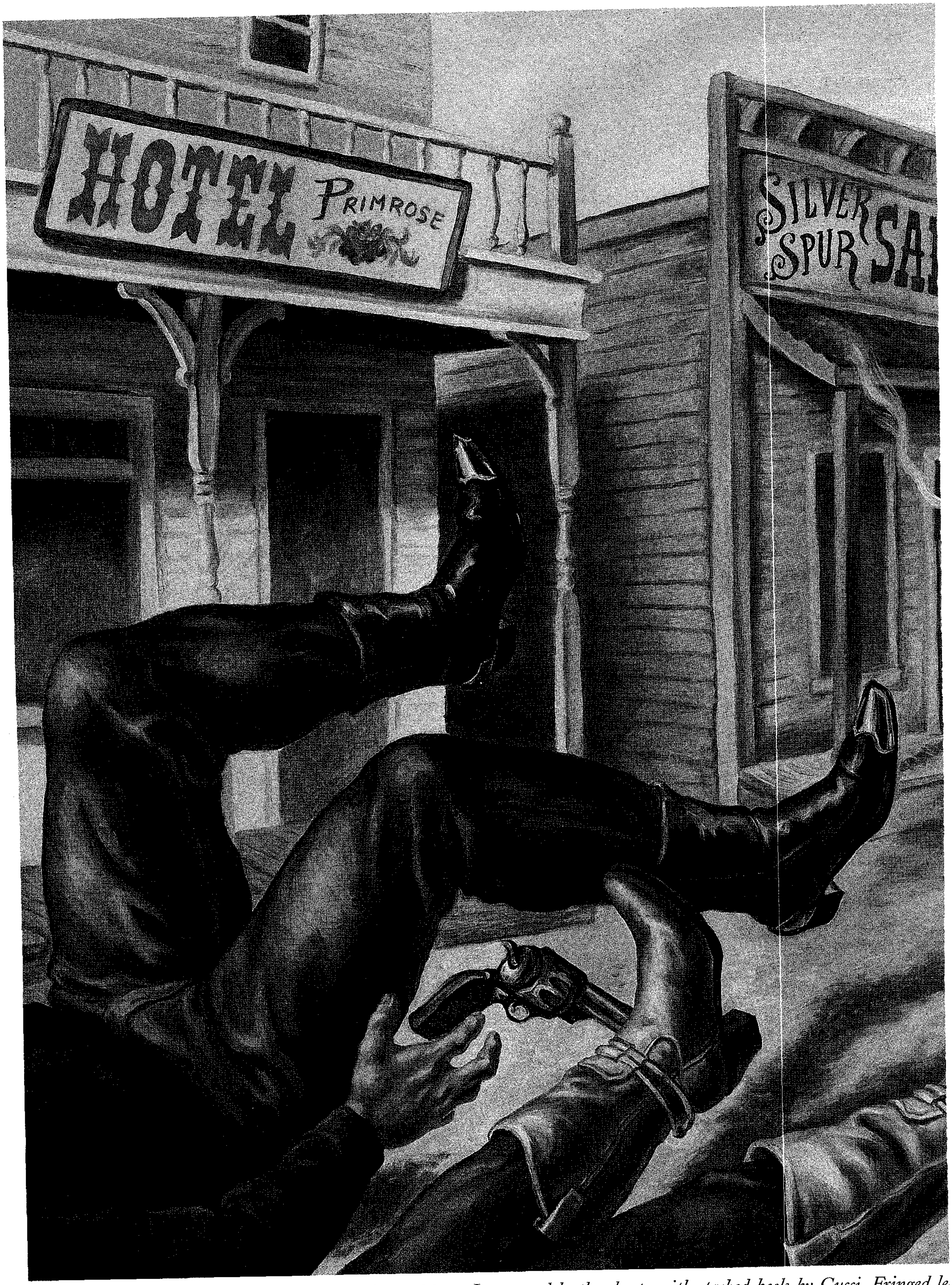
The next day, she sat quietly in the staging area behind the catwalk as an army clad in Prada shades of black, navy, dark gray, and brown readied the stage, prepared the security, and ushered the models to their positions. Rem Koolhaas had designed murals of Mars to accompany the music for the show: "Peter and the Wolf" spliced with Holst's "Planets," to produce contradictory visions of romance. Prada was dressed in a blue sweater, a black skirt, and high-heeled pumps. Across her chest she wore a diamond brooch in the shape—and almost the size—of a tree branch. "Where did you get that?" I asked. She smiled broadly. "Bertelli gave it to me for Christmas," she said. "Isn't it amazing?"

Suddenly, the show began. Prada stood at the entrance to the runway, making sure that every girl looked exactly the way she was supposed to. She watched on a monitor for twenty minutes as her eclectic interpretation of elegance was put on parade. When the show was over, Prada appeared on the runway, reluctantly, as always, and only for a second. She smiled, and so did her husband, who had come backstage with a glass of champagne in his hand. "Wasn't Miuccia strong?" he asked me. The critics certainly thought so. *Women's Wear Daily* called the collection "masterful." In the *Herald Tribune*, Suzy Menkes described it as one of "heroic elegance," and noted that Prada had "once again changed the register of fashion." In the *Times*, Cathy Horyn wrote, "With Tom Ford possibly headed for Hollywood . . . this city is now down to one superpower: Miuccia Prada."

Prada was pleased, but she doesn't take compliments easily. "I never understood fashion," she said when I asked her about the reaction to the show. "The whole world of it—the photographers, the celebrity status. I don't get it at all. I like clothes. I love clothes. But fashion and fame . . . Sometimes I just don't know." You could almost see the gears whirling in her head. "It's fun—it's wonderful," she said as fans started to surround her. "But it's something to keep you busy for ten minutes in the morning. Then you still have to face the rest of the day." ♦



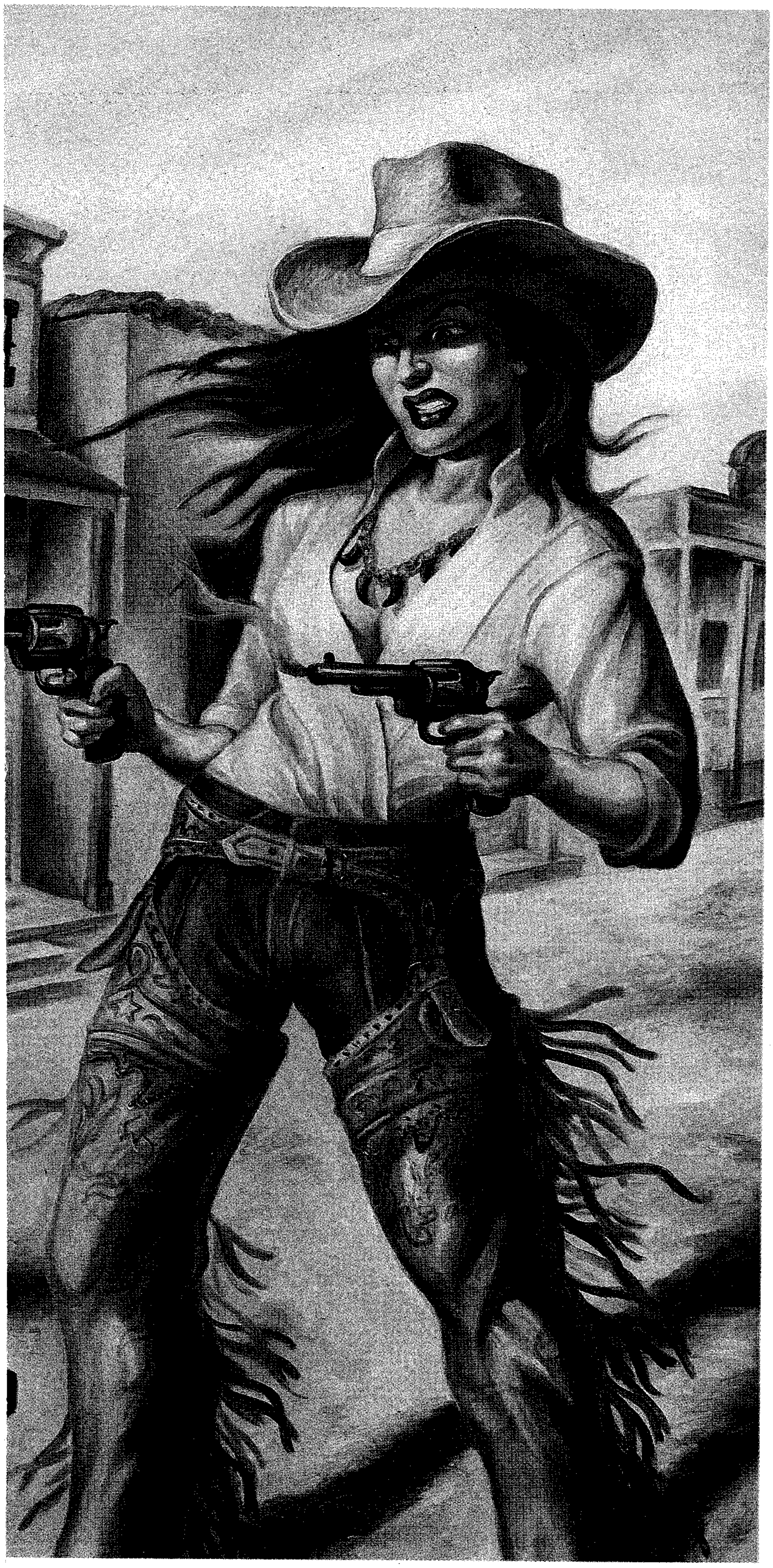
"If only we could stay home and TiVo the Carlsons."


HOTEL
PRIMROSE
SILVER
SPUR
SA

Black water-snake boots with metal tips (left) by Helmut Lang, and leather boots with stacked heels by Gucci. Fringed le

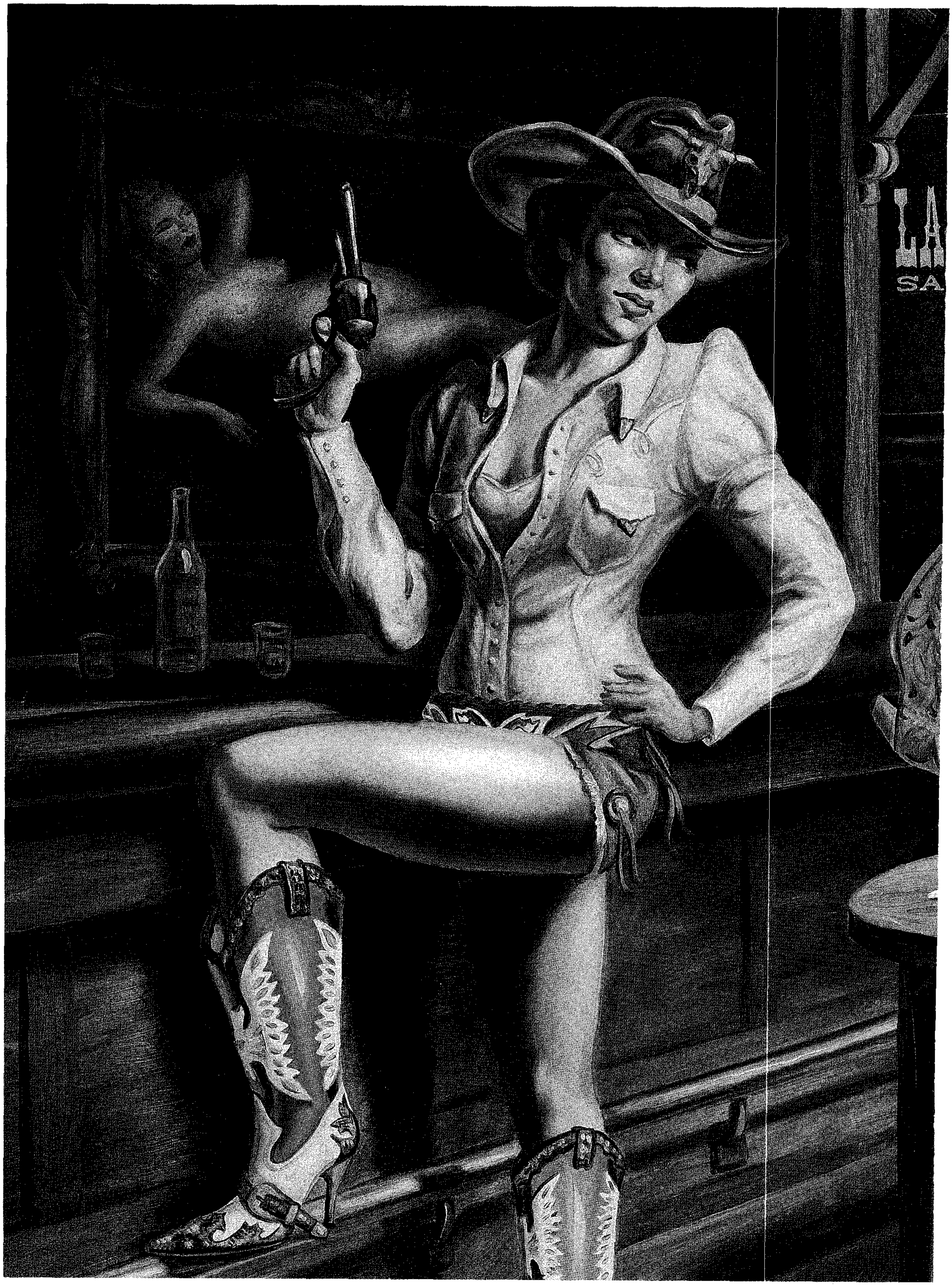
PORTFOLIO BY OWEN SMITH

GUNS 'N' ROSES

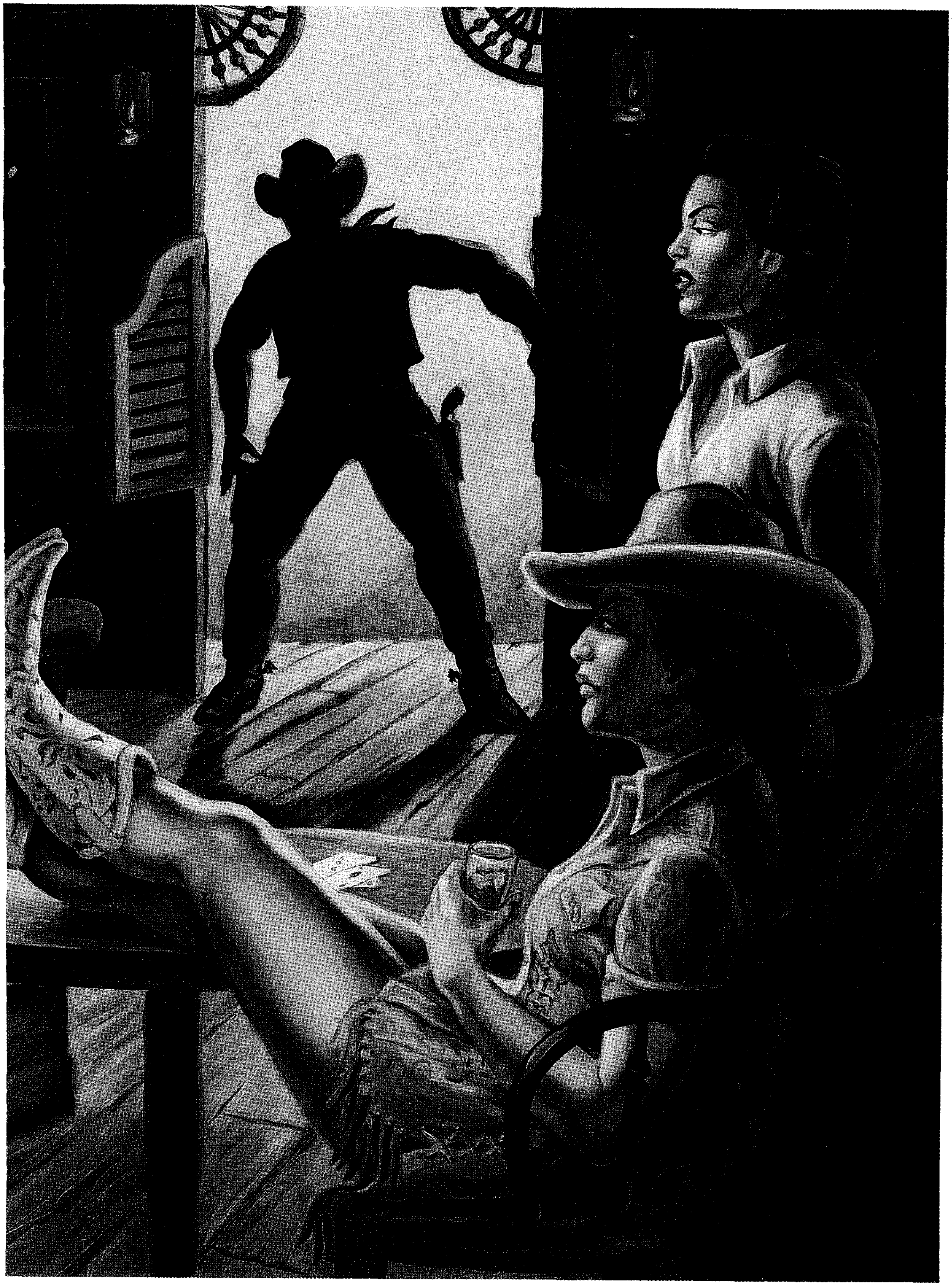


, *cotton blouse, and horn necklace with rhinestones, all by Roberto Cavalli.*

When Europeans call George Bush a cowboy, they mean that he's reckless and arrogant and a bully. Cowboys swagger through foreign landscapes, causing trouble. They carry guns and shoot people. But cowboys have really sexy gear, as has been acknowledged for at least a hundred years, and every decade or so cowboy boots and fringed-leather outfits and silver conchos find their way onto runways in Paris and Milan, no matter what the French and the Italians and the Germans think of American foreign policy. The stuff is based on clothing worn by cattle drovers in Texas and Kansas in the years immediately following the Civil War, but show business is the most important source of inspiration. The original cowboys wore broad-brimmed hats to shield their faces from the sun, and pointy-toed boots with high, underslung heels that kept their feet from slipping through stirrups. This was utilitarian. Then Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Hollywood embellished the look with fantasies about heroes and outlaws in exotic dress. By the nineteen-twenties, boots with spread-eagle inlays and scalloped collars and elaborate stitching patterns were being sold. And one of the first cowgirl movie stars, Ruth Roland, was slinging guns. Real Western women of that era were rather conservative, but female visitors to fashionable dude ranches adopted the tarted-up cowboy clothes, and by the thirties a more or less androgynous Western style had emerged. This spring, Roberto Cavalli and Jean-Paul Gaultier and other designers have conflated the cowgirl with the showgirl, presenting leather corsets and fringed minidresses, buckles and feathers in odd places, and boots that are perfect for walking on broken glass. Clothes to kick butt in. In a consensual context, of course.



Denim shorts with embroidered suède belt, worn with matching pink vinyl cowboy hat and snakeskin boots, all by D



her shirtdress with fringe and cross-stitching by Roberto Cavalli, and cutaway boots by Jean-Paul Gaultier.

ANNALS OF COMMERCE

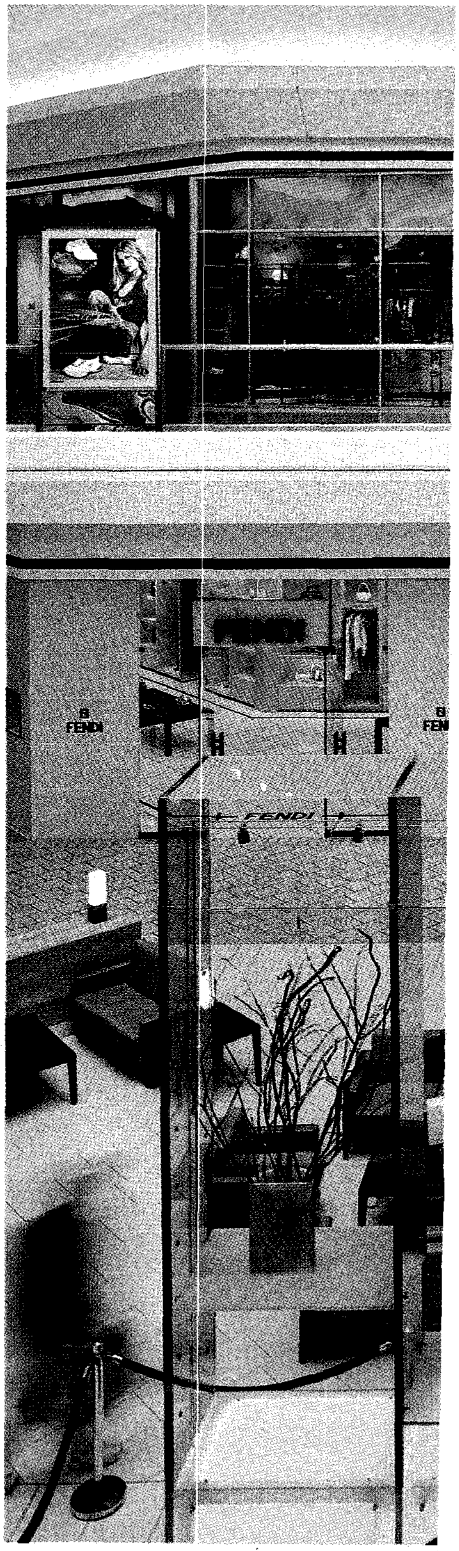
THE TERRAZZO JUNGLE

Fifty years ago, the mall was born. America would never be the same.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Victor Gruen was short, stout, and unstoppable, with a wild head of hair and eyebrows like unpruned hedgerows. According to a profile in *Fortune* (and people loved to profile Victor Gruen), he was a "torrential talker with eyes as bright as mica and a mind as fast as mercury." In the office, he was famous for keeping two or three secretaries working full time, as he moved from one to the next, dictating non-stop in his thick Viennese accent. He grew up in the well-to-do world of prewar Jewish Vienna, studying architecture at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts—the same school that, a few years previously, had turned down a fledgling artist named Adolf Hitler. At night, he performed satirical cabaret theatre in smoke-filled cafés. He emigrated in 1938, the same week as Freud, when one of his theatre friends dressed up as a Nazi Storm Trooper and drove him and his wife to the airport. They took the first plane they could catch to Zurich, made their way to England, and then boarded the S.S. Statendam for New York, landing, as Gruen later remembered, "with an architect's degree, eight dollars, and no English." On the voyage over, he was told by an American to set his sights high—"don't try to wash dishes or be a waiter, we have millions of them"—but Gruen scarcely needed the advice. He got together with some other German émigrés and formed the Refugee Artists Group. George S. Kaufman's wife was their biggest fan. Richard Rodgers and Al Jolson gave them money. Irving Berlin helped them with their music. Gruen got on the train to Princeton and came back with a letter of recommendation from Albert Einstein. By the summer of 1939, the group was on Broadway, playing eleven weeks at the Music Box. Then, as M. Jeffrey Hartwick recounts in "Mall Maker," his new biography of Gruen, one day he went for a walk in midtown and ran into an old friend from Vienna, Ludwig Lederer, who wanted to open a leather-goods boutique on Fifth Avenue. Victor agreed to design it, and the result was a revolutionary storefront, with a kind of mini-arcade in the entranceway, roughly seventeen by fifteen feet: six exquisite glass cases, spotlights, and faux marble, with green corrugated glass on the ceiling. It was a "customer trap." This was a brand-new idea in American retail design, particularly on Fifth Avenue, where all the carriage-trade storefronts were flush with the street. The critics raved. Gruen designed Ciro's on Fifth Avenue, Steckler's on Broadway, Paris Decorators on the Bronx Concourse, and eleven branches of the California clothing chain Grayson's. In the early fifties, he designed an outdoor shopping center called Northland outside Detroit for J. L. Hudson's. It covered a hundred and sixty-three acres and had nearly ten thousand parking spaces. This was little more than a decade and a half since he stepped off the boat, and when Gruen watched the bulldozers break ground he turned to his partner and said, "My God but we've got a lot of nerve."

But Gruen's most famous creation was his next project, in the town of Edina, just outside Minneapolis. He began work on it almost exactly fifty years ago. It was called Southdale. It cost twenty million dollars, and had seventy-two stores and two anchor department-store tenants, Donaldson's and Dayton's. Until then, most shopping centers had been what architects like to call "extroverted," meaning that store windows and entrances faced both the parking area and the interior pedestrian walkways. Southdale was introverted: the exterior walls were blank, and all the activity was focussed on the inside. Suburban shopping centers had always been in the open, with stores connected by outdoor passageways. Gruen had the idea of putting the whole complex under one roof, with air-conditioning for the summer and heat for the winter. Almost every other major shopping center had been built on a single level, which made for punishingly long walks. Gruen put stores on two levels, connected by escalators and fed by two-tiered parking. In the middle he put a kind of town square, a "garden court" under a skylight, with a fishpond, enormous sculpted trees, a twenty-one-foot cage filled with bright-



Alfred Taubman's Mall at Short Hills is

nost successful malls in the country. "We don't want anything to disrupt the view," he says. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

colored birds, balconies with hanging plants, and a café. The result, Hardwick writes, was a sensation:

> Journalists from all of the country's top magazines came for the Minneapolis shopping center's opening. *Life, Fortune, Time, Women's Wear Daily,* the *New York Times, Business Week* and *Newsweek* all covered the event. The national and local press wore out superlatives attempting to capture the feeling of Southdale. "The Splashiest Center in the U. S.," *Life* sang. The glossy weekly praised the incongruous combination of a "goldfish pond, birds, art and 10 acres of stores all . . . under one Minnesota roof." A "pleasure-dome-with-parking," *Time* cheered. One journalist announced that overnight Southdale had become an integral "part of the American Way."

Southdale Mall still exists. It is situated off I-494, south of downtown Minneapolis and west of the airport—a big concrete box in a sea of parking. The anchor tenants are now J. C. Penney and Marshall Field's, and there is an Ann Taylor and a Sunglass Hut and a Foot Locker and just about every other chain store that you've ever seen in a mall. It does not seem like a historic building, which is precisely why it is one. Fifty years ago, Victor Gruen designed a fully enclosed, introverted, multitiered, double-anchor-tenant shopping complex with a garden court under a skylight—and today virtually every regional shopping center in America is a fully enclosed, introverted, multitiered, double-anchor-tenant complex with a garden court under a skylight. Victor Gruen didn't design a building; he designed an archetype. For a decade, he gave speeches about it and wrote books and met with one developer after another and waved his hands in the air excitedly, and over the past half century that archetype has been reproduced so faithfully on so many thousands of occasions that today virtually every suburban American goes shopping or wanders around or hangs out in a Southdale facsimile at least once or twice a month. Victor Gruen may well have been the most influential architect of the twentieth century. He invented the mall.

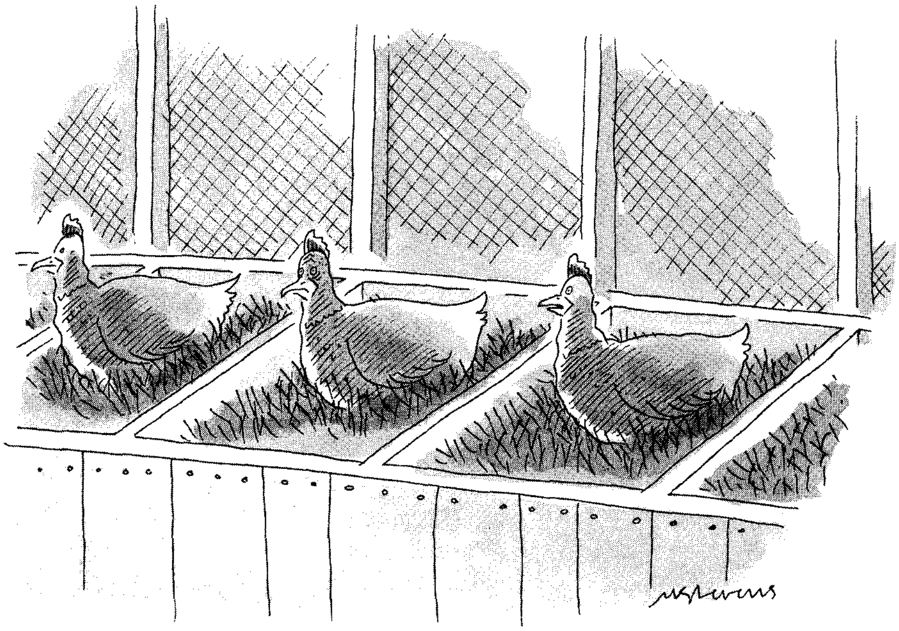
One of Gruen's contemporaries in the early days of the mall was a man named A. Alfred Taubman, who also started out as a store designer. In 1950, when Taubman was still in his twenties, he borrowed five thousand dollars, founded his own development firm, and, three years later, put up a twenty-six-store open-air shopping center in Flint, Michigan. A few years after that, inspired by Gruen, he matched Southdale with an enclosed mall of his own in Hayward, California, and over the next half century Taubman put together what is widely considered one of the finest collections of shopping malls in the world. The average American mall has annual sales of around three hundred and forty dollars per square foot. Taubman's malls average sales close to five hundred dollars per square foot. If Victor Gruen invented the mall, Alfred Taubman perfected it. One day not long ago, I asked Taubman to take me to one of his shopping centers and explain whatever it was that first drew people like him and Victor Gruen to the enclosed mall fifty years ago.

Taubman, who just turned eighty, is an imposing man with a wry sense of humor who wears bespoke three-piece suits and peers down at the world through half-closed eyes. He is the sort of old-fashioned man who refers to merchandise as "goods" and apparel as "soft goods" and who can glance at a couture gown from halfway across the room and come within a few dollars of its price.

"What time do you get off work?"

Recently, Taubman's fortunes took a turn for the worse when Sotheby's, which he bought in 1983, ran afoul of antitrust laws and he ended up serving a year-long prison sentence on price-fixing charges. Then his company had to fend off a hostile takeover bid led by Taubman's archrival, the Indianapolis-based Simon Property Group. But, on a recent trip from his Manhattan offices to the Mall at Short Hills, a half hour's drive away in New Jersey, Taubman was in high spirits. Short Hills holds a special place in his heart. "When I bought that property in 1980, there were only seven stores that were still in business," Taubman said, sitting in the back of his limousine. "It was a disaster. It was done by a large commercial architect who didn't understand what he was doing." Turning it around took four renovations. Bonwit Teller and B. Altman—two of the original anchor tenants—were replaced by Neiman Marcus, Saks, Nordstrom, and Macy's. Today, Short Hills has average sales of nearly eight hundred dollars per square foot; according to the Greenberg Group, it is the third-most-successful covered mall in the country. When Taubman and I approached the mall, the first thing he did was peer out at the parking garage. It was just before noon on a rainy Thursday. The garage was almost full. "Look at all the cars!" he said, happily.

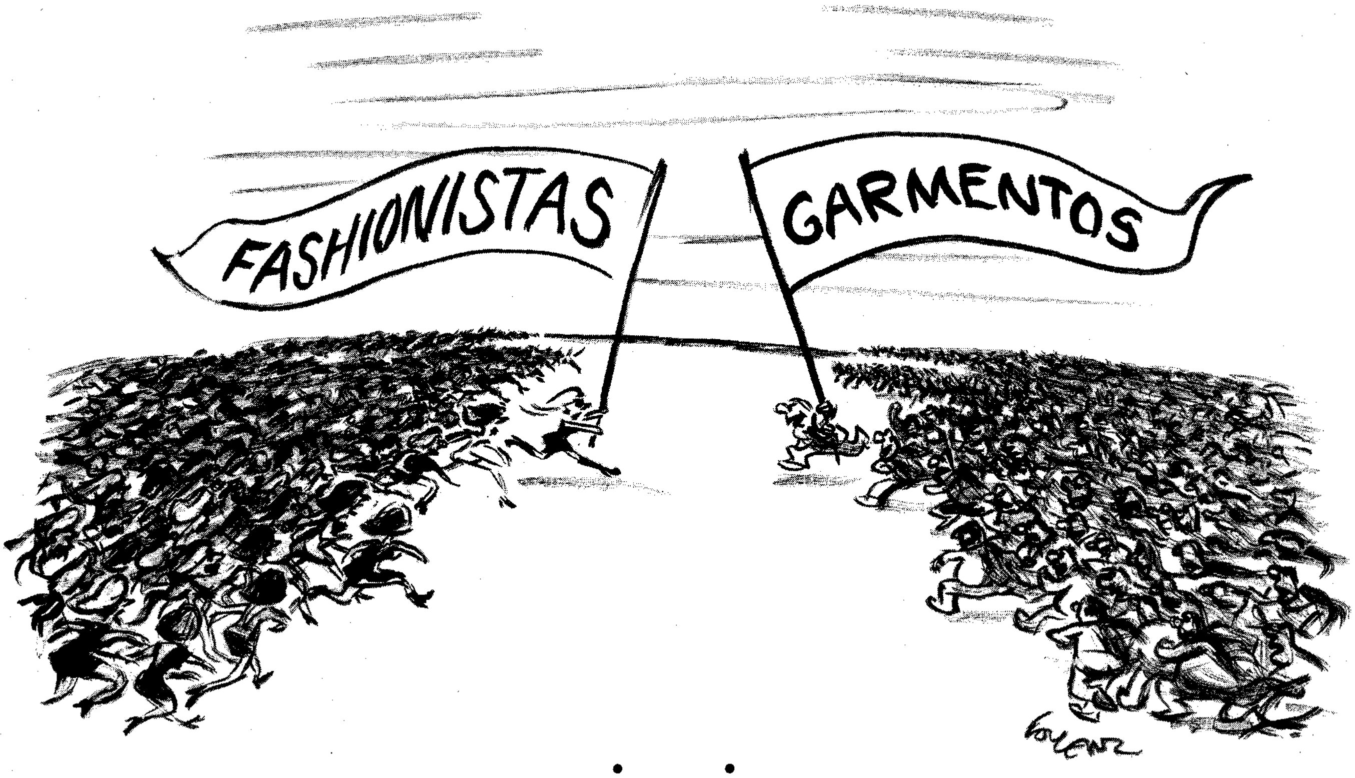
Taubman directed the driver to stop in front of Bloomingdale's, on the mall's north side. He walked through the short access corridor, paused, and pointed at the floor. It was made up of small stone tiles. "People used to use monolithic terrazzo in centers," he said. "But it cracked easily and was difficult to repair. Women, especially, tend to have thin soles. We found that they are very sensitive to the surface, and when they get on one of those terrazzo floors it's like a skating rink. They like to walk on the joints. The only direct contact you have with the building is through the floor. How you feel about it is very important." Then he looked up and pointed to the second floor of the mall. The handrails were transparent. "We don't want anything to disrupt the view," Taubman said. If you're walking on the first level, he explained, you have to be able, at all times, to have an unimpeded line of sight not just to the stores in front of you but also to the stores on the second level. The idea is to overcome what Taubman likes to call "threshold resistance," which is the physical and psychological barrier that stands between a shopper and the inside of a store. "You buy something because it is available and attractive," Taubman said. "You can't have any obstacles. The goods have to be all there." When Taubman was designing stores in Detroit, in the nineteen-forties, he realized that even the best arcades, like those Gruen designed on Fifth Avenue, weren't nearly as good at overcoming threshold resistance as an enclosed mall, because with an arcade you still had to get the customer through the door. "People assume we enclose the space because of air-conditioning and the weather, and that's important," Taubman said. "But the main reason is that it allows us to open up the store to the customer."


"Don't worry about it. It's probably just a head cold."

Taubman began making his way down the mall. He likes the main corridors of his shopping malls to be no more than a thousand feet long—the equivalent of about three city blocks—because he believes that three blocks is about as far as peak shopping interest can be sustained, and as he walked he explained the logic behind what retailers like to call "adjacencies." There was Brooks Brothers, where a man might buy a six-hundred-dollar suit, right across from Johnston & Murphy, where the same man might buy a two-hundred-dollar pair of shoes. The Bose electronics store was next to Brookstone and across from the Sharper Image, so if you got excited about some electronic gizmo in one store you were steps away from getting even more excited by similar gizmos in two other stores. Gucci, Versace, and Chanel were placed near the highest-end department stores, Neiman Marcus and Saks. "Lots of developers just rent out their space like you'd cut a salami," Taubman explained. "They rent the space based on whether it fits, not necessarily on whether it makes any sense." Taubman shook his head. He gestured to a Legal Sea Foods restaurant, where he wanted to stop for lunch. It was off the main mall, at the far end of a short entry hallway, and it was down there for a reason. A woman about to spend five thousand dollars at Versace doesn't want to catch a whiff of sautéed grouper as she tries on an evening gown. More to the point, people eat at Legal Sea Foods only during the lunch and dinner hours—which means that if you put the restaurant in the thick of things, you'd have a dead spot in the middle of your mall for most of the day.

At the far end of the mall is Neiman Marcus, and Taubman wandered in, exclaimed over a tray of men's ties, and delicately examined the stitching in the women's evening gowns in the designer department. "Hi, my name is Alfred Taubman—I'm your landlord," he said, bending over to greet a somewhat startled sales assistant. Taubman plainly loves Neiman Marcus, and with good reason: well-run department stores are the engines of malls. They have powerful brand names, advertise heavily, and carry extensive cosmetics lines (shopping malls are, at bottom, delivery systems for lipstick)—all of which generate enormous shopping traffic. The point of a mall—the reason so many stores are clustered together in one building—is to allow smaller, less powerful retailers to share in that traffic. A shopping center is an exercise in coöperative capitalism. It is considered successful (and the mall owner makes the most money) when the maximum number of department-store customers are lured into the mall.

Why, for instance, are so many malls, like Short Hills, two stories? Back at his office, on Fifth Avenue, Taubman took a piece of paper and drew a simple cross-section of a two-story building. "You have two levels, all right? You have an escalator here and an escalator here." He drew escalators at both ends of the floors. "The customer comes into the mall, walks down the hall, gets on the escalator up to the second level. Goes back along the second floor, down the escalator, and now she's back where she started from. She's seen every store in the center, right? Now you put on a third level. Is there any reason to go up there? No." A full circuit of a two-level mall takes you back to the beginning. It encourages you to circulate through the whole building. A full circuit of a three-level mall leaves you at the opposite end of the mall from your car. Taubman was the first to put a ring road around the mall—which he did at his mall in Hayward—for the same reason: if you want to get shoppers into every part of the building, they should be distributed to as many different entry points as possible. At Short Hills—and at most Taubman malls—the ring road rises gently as you drive around the building, so at least half of the mall entrances are on the second floor. "We put fifteen per cent more parking on the upper level than on the first level, because people flow like water," Taubman said. "They go down



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much easier than they go up. And we put our vertical transportation—the escalators—on the ends, so shoppers have to make the full loop."

This is the insight that drove the enthusiasm for the mall fifty years ago—that by putting everything under one roof, the retailer and the developer gained, for the first time, complete control over their environment. Taubman fusses about lighting, for instance: he believes that next to the skylights you have to put tiny lights that will go on when the natural light fades, so the dusk doesn't send an unwelcome signal to shoppers that it is time to go home; and you have to recess the skylights so that sunlight never reflects off the storefront glass, obscuring merchandise. Can you optimize lighting in a traditional downtown? The same goes for parking. Suppose that there was a downtown where the biggest draw was a major department store. Ideally, you ought to put the garage across the street and two blocks away, so shoppers, on their way from their cars and to their destination, would pass by the stores in between—dramatically increasing the traffic for all the intervening merchants. But in a downtown, obviously, you can't put a parking garage just anywhere, and even if you could, you couldn't insure that the stores in that high-traffic corridor had the optimal adjacencies, or that the sidewalk would feel right under the thin soles of women's shoes. And because the stores are arrayed along a road with cars on it, you don't really have a mall where customers can wander from side to side. And what happens when they get to the department store? It's four or five floors high, and shoppers are like water, remember: they flow downhill. So it's going to be hard to generate traffic on the upper levels. There is a tendency in America to wax nostalgic for the traditional downtown, but those who first believed in the mall—and understood its potential—found it hard to look at the old downtown with anything but frustration.

"In Detroit, prior to the nineteen-fifties, the large department stores, like Hudson's, controlled everything, like zoning," Taubman said. "They were generous to local politicians. They had enormous clout, and that's why when Sears wanted to locate in downtown Detroit they were told they couldn't. So Sears put a store in Highland Park and on Oakland Boulevard, and built a store on the East Side, and it was able to get some other stores to come with them, and before long there were three mini-downtowns in the suburbs. They used to call them hot spots." This happened more than half a century ago. But it was clear that Taubman has never quite got over how irrational the world outside the mall can be: downtown Detroit chased away traffic.

Planning and control were of even greater importance to Gruen. He was, after all, a socialist—and he was Viennese. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Vienna had demolished the walls and other fortifications that had ringed the city since medieval times, and in the resulting open space built the Ringstrasse—a meticulously articulated addition to the old city. Architects and urban planners solemnly outlined their ideas. There were apartment blocks, and public squares and government buildings, and shopping arcades, each executed in what was thought to be the historically appropriate style. The Rathaus was done in high Gothic; the Burgtheatre in early Baroque; the University was pure Renaissance; and the Parliament was classical Greek. It was all part of the official Viennese response to the populist uprisings of 1848: if Austria was to remake itself as a liberal democracy, Vienna had to be physically remade along democratic lines. The Parliament now faced directly onto the street. The walls that separated the élite of Vienna from the unwashed in the suburbs were torn down. And, most important, a ring road, or Ringstrasse—a grand mall—was built around the city, with wide sidewalks and expansive urban views, where Viennese of all backgrounds could mingle freely on their Sunday-afternoon stroll. To the Viennese reformers of the time, the quality of civic life was a function of the quality of the built environment, and Gruen thought that principle applied just as clearly to the American suburbs.

Not long after Southdale was built, Gruen gave the keynote address at a Progressive Architecture awards ceremony in New Orleans, and he took the occasion to lash out at American suburbia, whose roads, he said, were "avenues of horror," "flanked by the greatest collection of vulgarity—billboards, motels, gas stations, shanties, car lots, miscellaneous industrial equipment, hot dog stands, wayside stores—ever collected by mankind." American suburbia was chaos, and the only solution to chaos was planning. When Gruen first drew up the plans for Southdale, he placed the shopping center at the heart of a tidy four-hundred-and-sixty-three-acre development, complete with apartment buildings, houses, schools, a medical center, a park, and a lake. Southdale was not a suburban alternative to downtown Minneapolis. It was the Minneapolis downtown you would get if you started over and corrected all the mistakes that were made the first time around. "There is nothing suburban about Southdale except its location," *Architectural Record* stated when it reviewed Gruen's new creation. It is

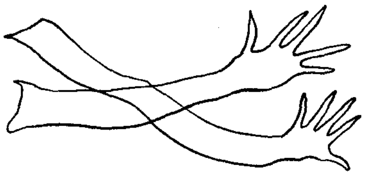
> an imaginative distillation of what makes downtown magnetic: the variety, the individuality, the lights, the color, even the crowds—for Southdale's pedestrian-scale spaces insure a busyness and a bustle. Added to this essence of existing downtowns are all kinds of things that ought to be there if downtown weren't so noisy and dirty and chaotic—sidewalk cafés, art, islands of planting, pretty paving. Other shopping centers, however pleasant, seem provincial in contrast with the real thing—the city downtown. But in Minneapolis, it is the downtown that appears pokey and provincial in contrast with Southdale's metropolitan character.

One person who wasn't dazzled by Southdale was Frank Lloyd Wright. "What is this, a railroad station or a bus station?" he asked, when he came for a tour. "You've got a garden court that has all the evils of the village street and none of its charm." But no one much listened to Frank Lloyd Wright. When it came to malls, it was only Victor Gruen's vision that mattered.

Victor Gruen's grand plan for Southdale was never realized. There were no parks or schools or apartment buildings—just that big box in a sea of parking. Nor, with a few exceptions, did anyone else plan the shopping mall as the centerpiece of a tidy, dense, multi-use development. Gruen was right about the transformative effect of the mall on retailing. But in thinking that he could reënact the lesson of the Ringstrasse in American suburbia he was wrong, and the reason was that in the mid-nineteen-fifties the economics of mall-building suddenly changed.

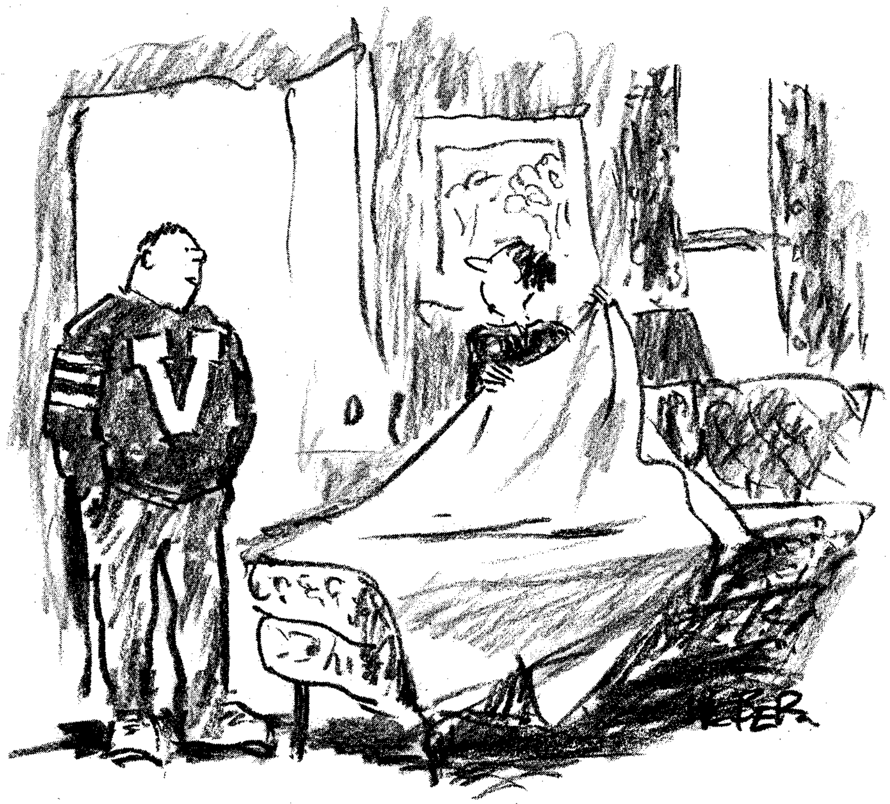
At the time of Southdale, big shopping centers were a delicate commercial proposition. One of the first big postwar shopping centers was Shopper's World, in Framingham, Massachusetts, designed by an old business partner of Gruen's from his Fifth Avenue storefront days. Shopper's World was an open center covering seventy acres, with forty-four stores, six thousand parking spaces, and a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-square-foot Jordan Marsh department store—and within two years of its opening, in 1951, the developer was bankrupt. A big shopping center simply cost too much money, and it took too long for a developer to make that money back. Gruen thought of the mall as the centerpiece of a carefully planned new downtown because he felt that that was the only way malls would ever get built: you planned because you had to plan. Then, in the mid-fifties, something happened that turned the dismal economics of the mall upside down: Congress made a radical change in the tax rules governing depreciation.

Under tax law, if you build an office building, or buy a piece of machinery for your factory, or make any capital purchase for your business, that investment is assumed to deteriorate and lose some part of its value from wear and tear every year. As a result, a business is allowed to set aside some of its income, tax-free, to pay for the eventual cost of replacing capital investments. For tax purposes, in the early fifties the useful life of a building was held to be forty years, so a developer could deduct one-fortieth of the value of his building from his income every year. A new forty-million-dollar mall, then, had an annual depreciation deduction of a million dollars. What Congress did in 1954, in an attempt to stimulate investment in manufacturing, was to "accelerate" the depreciation process for new construction. Now, using this and other tax loopholes, a mall developer could recoup the cost of his investment in a fraction of the time. As the historian Thomas Hanchett argues, in a groundbreaking paper in *The American Historical Review*, the result was a "bonanza" for developers. In the first few years after a shopping center was built, the depreciation deductions were so large that the mall was almost certainly losing money, at least on paper—which brought with it enormous tax benefits. For instance, in a front-page article in 1961 on the effect of the depreciation changes, the *Wall Street Journal* described the finances of a real-estate investment company called Kratter Corp. Kratter's revenue from its real-estate operations in 1960 was $9,997,043. Deductions from operating expenses and mortgage interest came to $4,836,671, which left a healthy income of $5.16 million. Then came depreciation, which came to $6.9 million, so now Kratter's healthy profit had been magically turned into a "loss" of $1.76 million. Imagine that you were one of five investors in Kratter. The company's policy was to distribute nearly all of its pre-depreciation revenue to its investors, so your share of their earnings would be roughly a million dollars. Ordinarily, you'd pay a good chunk of that in taxes. But that million dollars wasn't income. After depreciation, Kratter didn't make any money. That million dollars was "return on capital," and it was tax-free.



Suddenly it was possible to make much more money investing in things like shopping centers than buying stocks, so money poured into real-estate investment companies. Prices rose dramatically. Investors were putting up buildings, taking out as much money from them as possible using accelerated depreciation, then selling them four or five years later at a huge profit—whereupon they built an even bigger building, because the more expensive the building was, the more the depreciation allowance was worth.

Under the circumstances, who cared whether the shopping center made economic sense for the venders? Shopping centers and strip malls became what urban planners call "catalytic," meaning that developers weren't building them to serve existing suburban communities; they were building them on the fringes of cities, beyond residential developments, where the land was cheapest. Hanchett points out, in fact, that in many cases the growth of malls appears to follow no demographic logic at all. Cortland, New York, for instance, barely grew at all between 1950 and 1970. Yet in those two decades Cortland gained six new shopping plazas, including the four-hundred-thousand-square-foot enclosed Cortlandville Mall. In the same twenty-year span, the Scranton area actually shrank by seventy-three thousand people while gaining thirty-one shopping centers, including three enclosed malls. In 1953, before accelerated depreciation was put in place, one major regional shopping center was built in the United States. Three years later, after the law was passed, that number was twenty-five. In 1953, new shopping-center construction of all kinds totalled six million square feet. By 1956, that figure had increased five hundred per cent. This was also the era that fast-food restaurants and Howard Johnsons and Holiday Inns and muffler shops and convenience stores began to multiply up and down the highways and boulevards of the American suburbs—and as these developments grew, others followed to share in the increased customer traffic. Malls led to malls, and in turn those malls led to the big stand-alone retailers like Wal-Mart and Target, and then the "power centers" of three or four big-box retailers, like Circuit City, Staples, Barnes & Noble. Victor Gruen intended Southdale to be a dense, self-contained downtown. Today, fifteen minutes down an "avenue of horror" from Southdale is the Mall of America, the largest mall in the country, with five hundred and twenty stores, fifty restaurants, and twelve thousand parking spaces—and one can easily imagine that one day it, too, may give way to something newer and bigger.



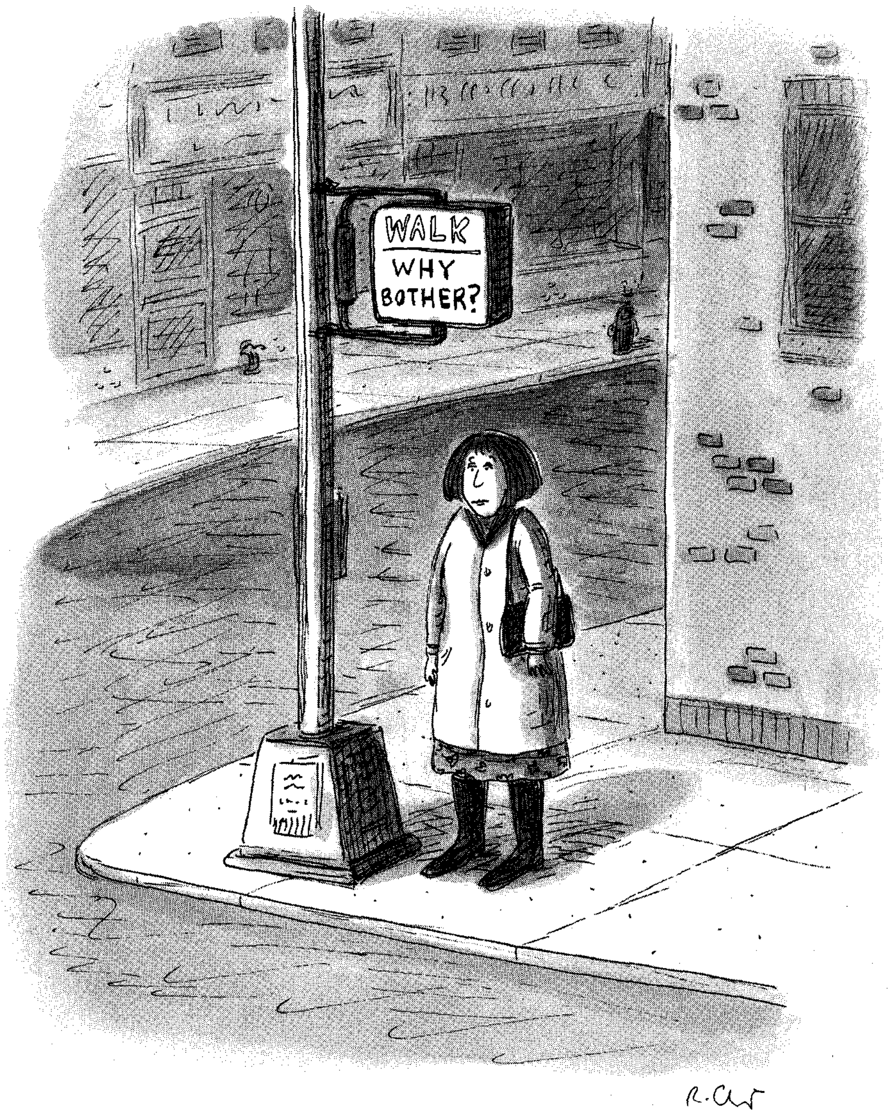
"I've never mentioned this, Mom, but I feel pretty."

Once, in the mid-fifties, Victor Gruen sat down with a writer from *The New Yorker's* Talk of the Town to give his thoughts on how to save New York City. The interview took place in Gruen's stylish offices on West Twelfth Street, in an old Stanford White building, and one can only imagine the reporter, rapt, as Gruen held forth, eyebrows bristling. First, Gruen said, Manhattan had to get rid of its warehouses and its light manufacturing. Then, all the surface traffic in midtown—the taxis, buses, and trucks—had to be directed into underground tunnels. He wanted to put superhighways around the perimeter of the island, buttressed by huge double-decker parking garages. The jumble of tenements and town houses and apartment blocks that make up Manhattan would be replaced by neat rows of hundred-and-fifty-story residential towers, arrayed along a ribbon of gardens, parks, walkways, theatres, and cafés.

> Mr. G. lowered his brows and glared at us. "You are troubled by all those tunnels, are you not?" he inquired. "You wonder whether there is room for them in the present underground jungle of pipes and wires. Did you never think how absurd it is to bury beneath tons of solid pavement equipment that is bound to go on the blink from time to time?" He leaped from his chair and thrust an imaginary pneumatic drill against his polished study floor. "Rat-a-tat-tat!" he exclaimed. "Night and day! Tear up the streets! Then pave them! Then tear 'em up again!" Flinging aside the imaginary drill, he threw himself back in his chair. "In my New York of the future, all pipes and wires will be strung along the upper sides of those tunnels, above a catwalk, accessible to engineers and painted brilliant colors to delight rather than appall the eye."

Postwar America was an intellectually insecure place, and there was something intoxicating about Gruen's sophistication and confidence. That was what took him, so dramatically, from standing at New York Harbor with eight dollars in his pocket to Broadway, to Fifth Avenue, and to the heights of Northland and Southdale. He was a European intellectual, an émigré, and, in the popular mind, the European émigré represented vision, the gift of seeing something grand in the banality of postwar American life. When the European visionary confronted a drab and congested urban landscape, he didn't tinker and equivocate; he levelled warehouses and buried roadways and came up with a thrilling plan for making things right. "The chief means of travel will be walking," Gruen said, of his reimagined metropolis. "Nothing like walking for peace of mind." At Northland, he said, thousands of people would show up, even when the stores were closed, just to walk around. It was exactly like Sunday on the Ringstrasse. With the building of the mall, Old World Europe had come to suburban Detroit.

What Gruen had, as well, was an unshakable faith in the American marketplace. Malls teach us, he once said, that "it's the merchants who will save our urban civilization. 'Planning' isn't a dirty word to them; good planning means good business." He went on, "Sometimes self-interest has remarkable spiritual consequences." Gruen needed to believe this, as did so many European intellectuals from that period, dubbed by the historian Daniel Horowitz "celebratory émigrés." They had fled a place of chaos and anxiety, and in American consumer culture they sought a bulwark against the madness across the ocean. They wanted to find in the jumble of the American marketplace something as grand as the Vienna they had lost—the place where the unconscious was meticulously dissected by Dr. Freud on Berggasse, and where shrines to European civilization—to the Gothic, the Baroque, the Renaissance, and the ancient Greek traditions—were erected on the Ringstrasse. To Americans, nothing was more flattering than this. Who didn't want to believe that the act of levelling warehouses and burying roadways had spiritual consequences? But it was, in the end, too good to be true. This wasn't the way America worked at all.



A few months ago, Alfred Taubman gave a speech to a real-estate trade association in Detroit, about the prospects for the city's downtown, and one of the things he talked about was Victor Gruen's Northland. It was simply too big, Taubman said. Hudson's, the Northland anchor tenant, already had a flagship store in downtown Detroit. So why did Gruen build a six-hundred-thousand-square-foot satellite at Northland, just a twenty-minute drive away? Satellites were best at a hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred thousand square feet. But at six hundred thousand square feet they were large enough to carry every merchandise line that the flagship store carried, which meant no one had any reason to make the trek to the flagship anymore. Victor Gruen said the lesson of Northland was that the merchants would save urban civilization. He didn't appreciate that it made a lot more sense, for his client, to save civilization at a hundred and fifty thousand square feet than at six hundred thousand square feet. The lesson of America was that the grandest of visions could be derailed by the most banal of details, like the size of the retail footprint, or whether Congress set the depreciation allowance at forty years or twenty years.

When, late in life, Gruen came to realize this, it was a powerfully disillusioning experience. He revisited one of his old shopping centers, and saw all the sprawling development around it, and pronounced himself in "severe emotional shock." Malls, he said, had been disfigured by "the ugliness and discomfort of the land-wasting seas of parking" around them. Developers were interested only in profit. "I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments," he said in a speech in London, in 1978. He turned away from his adopted country. He had fixed up a country house outside of Vienna, and soon he moved back home for good. But what did he find when he got there? Just south of old Vienna, a mall had been built—in his anguished words, a "gigantic shopping machine." It was putting the beloved independent shopkeepers of Vienna out of business. It was crushing the life of his city. He was devastated. Victor Gruen invented the shopping mall in order to make America more like Vienna. He ended up making Vienna more like America. ♦

FICTION

IN THE PALACE OF THE END

BY MARTIN AMIS

وداعاً
ياعلوج

As one of the doubles of the son of the dictator, I am often to be found in the Palace of the End. Six days a week, to be precise: and twelve hours a day. Actual public impersonations of the successor—parades, investitures, going on television, and the like—are by now a thing of the past. But we have our standing duties. In the mornings, I set about my work in the Interrogation Wing. Then, in the afternoons, following a glass of scented coffee with the other doubles, I make filmed love to—or have filmed sex with—a series of picked beauties in the Recreation Wing. The Palace of the End is built in the shape of a titanic eagle: the beaked head downturned, the scalloped pinions outthrust. . . . It was the brainchild of Old Nadir, who is very slowly dying of the injuries he sustained in the notorious "toilet bomb" assault at another of his palaces, in the south of our country. And now all power rests with his only son: Nadir the Next.

Until recently, at least, my work in the Interrogation Wing was not particularly onerous. I wasn't obliged to participate in the full course of the numerous procedures. *My* job was to "appear," super suddenly, at the climax of this or that cross-questioning (which might have gone on for days or weeks); flanked by armed infantrymen, I would stamp into the cubicle, wearing camouflage fatigues and cripplingly heavy combat boots, and administer one backhand blow to the suspect's face. And that was all. But nowadays, for several reasons, I am expected, as are the other doubles, to apply myself more variedly. We have not exactly been reduced to the status of mere bucket boys and poker-warmers—no; but in these tense times we must put ourselves about and show willing.

The interior of the Interrogation Wing used to be laid out in the traditional "cells and cellars" arrangement: dripping passageways, clanking iron doors, rooms within rooms ("the kennels"), and so on—with the howls and screeches of the suspects decently muffled or snatched or cut short. Now it's rather more open plan. One enters an anti-hospital, a vast factory of excruciation: there the strappado, here the bastinado; there the rack, here the wheel. The more communal atmosphere is meant "to discourage the others," and it's certainly true that, as far as the suspect is concerned, the introduction to the Interrogation Wing is far worse than any death. Indeed, it became almost universal practice for the prisoners to attempt summary suicide by the only means available: the dental excision of their own tongues.

THOMAS HEGENBART/FOCUS/CONTACT

However understandable, this response also entrained a paradox: the tongueless ones could neither proclaim their innocence nor (by far the wiser course) trumpet their guilt. In one way, it made no difference. At a certain point—perhaps months later—the prisoner's head would give a lolling nod, and the interrogator would stroll to the old Xerox machine for the standard confession, which the prisoner would then initial. After more torture preludial to death, ninety-nine per cent of those who enter the Interrogation Wing are eventually hanged; the remainder are sent home fatally envenomed, with a day or two to live—and, no doubt, a tale or two to tell. It goes without saying that this minority never includes any tongueless ones. They have a tale to tell, but they will never tell it.

Anyway, these days the question of the tongueless ones is academic. There are no more tongueless ones. All suspects now have their teeth smashed and pulled in the cubicles of the Reception Hall, long before they are even fingerprinted by the registrars.

At twelve-forty-five, the doubles congregate in the doubles' commissary, which is situated in the main body of the building—in the golden eagle's muscular torso. At any given time there are twenty or thirty doubles stationed at the Palace of the End (though there are scores of us in the capital, and dozens more in every major provincial town). Idling and milling around the doubles' commissary, we enjoy a glass of coffee, and ready ourselves for the work of the afternoon.

For a double, this half hour in the doubles' commissary is a depersonalizing experience, to say the least. We all measure six feet one, and we all weigh two hundred and twenty-seven pounds. We all have the same glistening black quiff, the same protuberant, blood-flecked brown eyes, the same slablike front teeth (with the same missing canine), the same patch over the same eye. We wear an eye patch because Nadir wears an eye patch; and Nadir wears an eye patch because he was shot in the face, by a bodyguard, seventeen months ago. And here I touch on one of the heavier duties of a Presidential double. All the injuries sustained by Nadir, during the course of the increasingly frequent and desperate attempts on his life, must, naturally, be duplicated in his surrogates. For the blast to the left eye, we were, in turn, strapped and clamped into position with a small blunderbuss poised on a tripod six inches away; many doubles were lost in the initial efforts (despite countless experiments on a variety of suspects), and many more were decommissioned when their wounds failed to heal in the proper way. Similarly, every double lacks a right kneecap, a left heel, a left shoulder, and the fourth and fifth fingers of his left hand. We have all spent time in wheelchairs, on crutches, in neck braces, in arm casts. We are additionally subject to periodic poisonings. More recently, we all had our hair scorched off (after a flamethrower attack on the son of the dictator), and for a while a team of barbers and surgeons appeared every day to regulate the condition of our fuzz and blisters.

Entering the doubles' commissary is, as I say, a depersonalizing experience. It is to enter a hall of mirrors. Who is that man by the window with his back turned to the room? He slowly swivels. Yes: it is I. . . . There's no little pleasure to be had, naturally, in mingling with one's peers. But the conversation is always somewhat strained. It isn't just the guaranteed presence of five or six professional informers, posing as doubles—for we are all informers, and inform on one another as a matter of course. No. It is the feeling (entirely unfounded, no doubt) that Nadir himself is perhaps among us. Once in a while, as you pass the time of day and complain about the weather, you sense in your interlocutor a wavering heat in the eyes, and a heat from the body (and a hot smell, too: the smell of power) that seems to betray the proximity of the Next.

There is one double, and one double only, with whom I feel I can be more or less myself: Mekhlis. I always know it's

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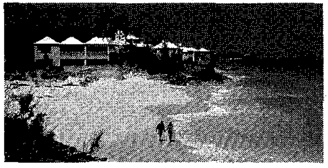

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him: like me, Mekhlis had a large facial mole removed (or, rather, relocated), and there is a circular blur on his cheek that matches the blur on mine. Today, I edged up to Mekhlis in the conservatory bay that leads out to the gardens with their parrots and apes. I said, "What was in that *sack*?"

"*What* sack?" he answered in the same gross baritone. Our trouble is that our tongues are too big: too big for our mouths. "Oh, *that* sack," Mekhlis said.

Earlier in the morning, I had spent an abnormally uncomfortable half hour yelling at a suspect while a blood-steeped canvas mailbag jerked and jumped around the cubicle floor. The scream it emitted put one in mind of a boiling kettle.

Mekhlis said, "The sack contained the suspect's three-year-old daughter. And some starving animals."

"Yes, but which animals, for the love of God?"

"Oh, bats and cats and rats. But this lot had been injected with large doses of amphetamine."

"Why do they not instantly confess?" I began.

We shook our heads and wiped our brows.

"The untongueless ones—does nobody listen to them?"

"They may listen, but they don't believe," Mekhlis said. "Everyone thinks the untongueless ones are mad. They *are* mad."

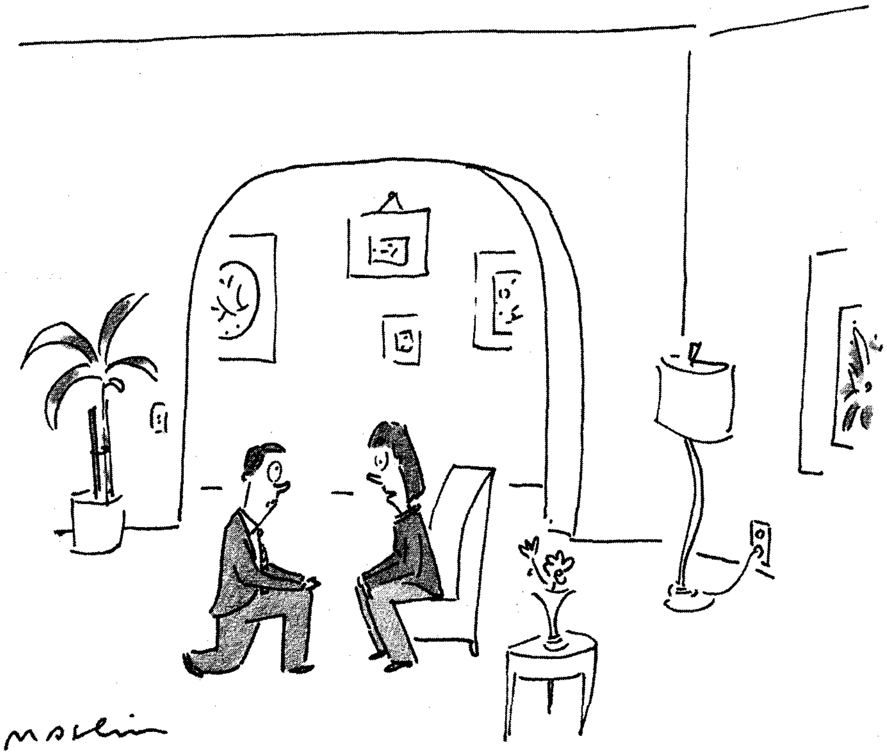
"Perhaps they can't confess because they're innocent." And the consciousness of innocence must be a very powerful thing, I thought. "But they don't understand. Innocence, guilt: this is not Nadir's way." Nadir didn't want them to confess to a truth. He wanted them to join in a fiction. "It would be better if we . . ."

But then a third double drew near, and Mekhlis fell to talking about the dust storms.

At one-fifteen, we filed out to the locker room, where we exchange our combat boots for pointed slippers and our camouflage fatigues for silk kimonos; the black beret is doffed in favor of the pomaded tarboosh with its crimson tassel.

Somehow the months pass.

Not that long ago, Nadir was having us consort with women of the Jezebel type, demimondaines, courtesans, glistening houris. And we were always under strict instructions to use them roughly. The policy change began when Nadir was shot in the kneecap, and became radical when he was shot in the face. No longer the snarling sodom-



"Bring . . . it . . . on. Uh, I mean, yes, Ned, I'll marry you."

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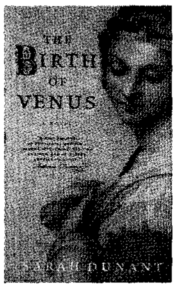

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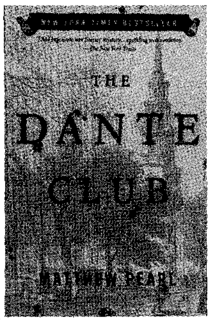

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RANDOM HOUSE

izings, the raucous "squad bangs," and so on. Now we recline in luxurious apartments with our lady friends of the afternoon; we feed them peeled jargonelles drenched in choice liqueurs; I might softly declaim a few verses of the immortal poet Narciso as I reach for my lute. Then, at two-fifty, you become aware of the activation of the camera, and you proceed.

Nowadays, a double's best possible result, in the Recreation Wing, is to bring about multiple orgasm. Any kind of orgasm at all is an inestimable prize; and a solid success rate will suffice to protect a double from disfavor or disgrace or disaster. But multiple—and preferably continuous—orgasm is what we always feel we have to aim for, and it is a not entirely happy double who, sipping his cola in the commissary at seven-thirty-five, has failed, that day, to achieve it.

At the time, it was thought that the reason for Nadir's policy change was baldly utilitarian. He had, by then, simply run out of odalisques and *filles de nuit*, and was now working his way through the general population: young nurses, young secretaries, young schoolteachers—nearly all of them young widows, needless to say. I do not subscribe to this explanation (and am attempting to formulate my own). But the fact remains that the double confronts an altogether different kind of assignment in the Recreation Wing. On entry into its apartments, as I made the air hum with my switch, I used to encounter an ogreish wink and a lewd roll of the tongue. Now I encounter the isolated stare of the girl next door, and do so with diffidence. Mekhlis claims he speaks for all the doubles when he says that they liked it much, much better in the old days: you make your pact with pain, and that's that. Well, he doesn't speak for me. The new pressures faced by a double push down into the very lining of a man, and involve mortal danger (not least from suicide). But I wouldn't go back. No, I wouldn't go back.

And the months do pass.

Your first objective, of course, is to still the trembling. Normally you would hope to get this out of the way over lunch: you calmly adumbrate what lies ahead, and itemize the re-

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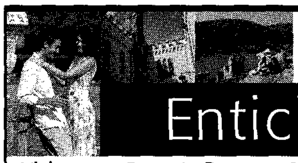

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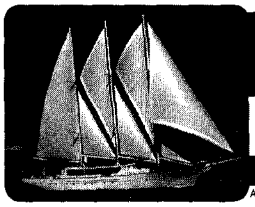

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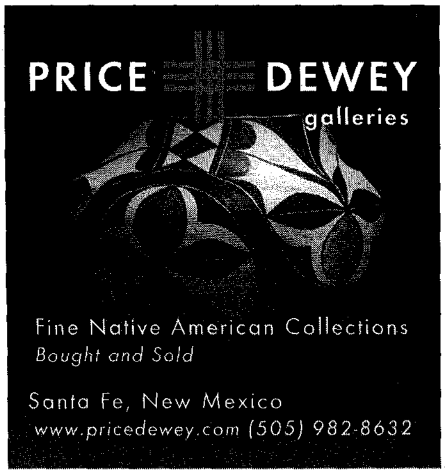
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wards and penalties attending success or failure. (The young women are also sharply warned that the lengthy verification process—polygram, scopolamine—will expose all attempts at simulation: such an orgasm, as interpreted by the Next, is a deadly affront.) And yet some of them go on trembling well into the afternoon, despite the skilled foot massage, the reciprocal ablutions, the application of many a telling unguent. Indeed, some of them never stop trembling, and the challenge, in these cases, is to find the deeper rhythm or logic of it, and so transform vibration into vibrancy. It is not the work of a moment.

Today, for example, I entertained a young anesthetist from the provincial capital. Judiciously, I plied her with fine wines, told her a succession of amusing anecdotes, and recited certain stanzas in praise of her pulchritude, which was considerable, despite the belly-dancer outfit and the ghoulish maquillage on which Nadir still invariably insists—and despite the cladding of hatred in her eyes. The young anesthetist's hands and voice were steady enough; but when I romantically hoisted her into my arms and carried her to the bed she felt like a bronze statue (one of the more modest statues of the Next, perhaps)—all suppleness and buoyancy lost, and as cold and adhesive as dry ice. Toward the end of the third hour of unpunctuated cunnilingus, I thought I might be beginning to get somewhere; but in the end the young anesthetist was unable to respond. She will lose her passport and her right to medical assistance. As for me, the non-satisfaction, the anticlimax, will go on my P-card. It will be noticed.

We used to have the ability, sometimes, to arouse them with our beauty. For we once were beautiful. Regrettably, during his various incapacitations, the Next has now gained some ninety-five pounds; and there are also the hideous "splatter wounds" to his chest and back, sustained in a dual R.P.G. and I.E.D. assault (rocket-propelled grenade and improvised explosive device) while he was travelling underground by monorail. Then, too, there was the hit from the A.T.S.—or anti-tank shell—he took in the ballroom of a provincial palace, whose casing, and much glass, became temporarily embedded in his crown and nape. No, we are not beautiful any longer. One vast lesion: that's what I am. When we shower together—and there are only a dozen of us now—we look all red and raw, like a convocation of enormous penises.

The darkest moment of the day, I find—surprisingly, perhaps—is the midday change: the adoption of the pointed slippers. This is when I have to deal with my humanity, and answer the questions posed to me by my shrivelled soul. And so I gird myself for the next cowering honey-blonde, the next pale brunette, the next resplendently contemptuous redhead, all of them trembling, trembling.

Obviously, anticlimax does not represent success—but there is a whole other order of failure. A whole other magnitude of failure. We don't talk about it. Mekhlis doesn't talk about it. I don't talk about it. This is why the moment in the locker room is, if you like, a confession: a confession of the male secret. . . . To err is human. It can be tolerated, every now and again. But we all know the point at which we can expect the lavish, the in-wrought wrath of the potentate. And there is, of course, another reason that this second order of failure—so radical, so all-deciding—particularly incenses Nadir the Next.

At eight o'clock, we repair to our separate bungalows on the grounds. Fraternization among doubles was always strongly discouraged (to thwart conspiracy), but now, in these days of laxity and dissolution, as the Next ages, as we age, there is a more or less nightly bazaar of black-market aphrodisiacs in our compound, all kinds of potions and philtres—every known quackery, as well as every known pharmaceutical. To step out into the capital is, of course, an impossibility; a double wouldn't last half a minute in the capital, or anywhere else. But here at night, with all these pots and packets and powders, so needfully assembled and dispersed, we can still get a sense of the life of the city. . . . I stand before the mirror. I am choking on my own tongue—it looks like the fin of a flayed shark—and must soon submit to my third lingual "carve-down." Is that myself I see, or am I staring through glass at another double?

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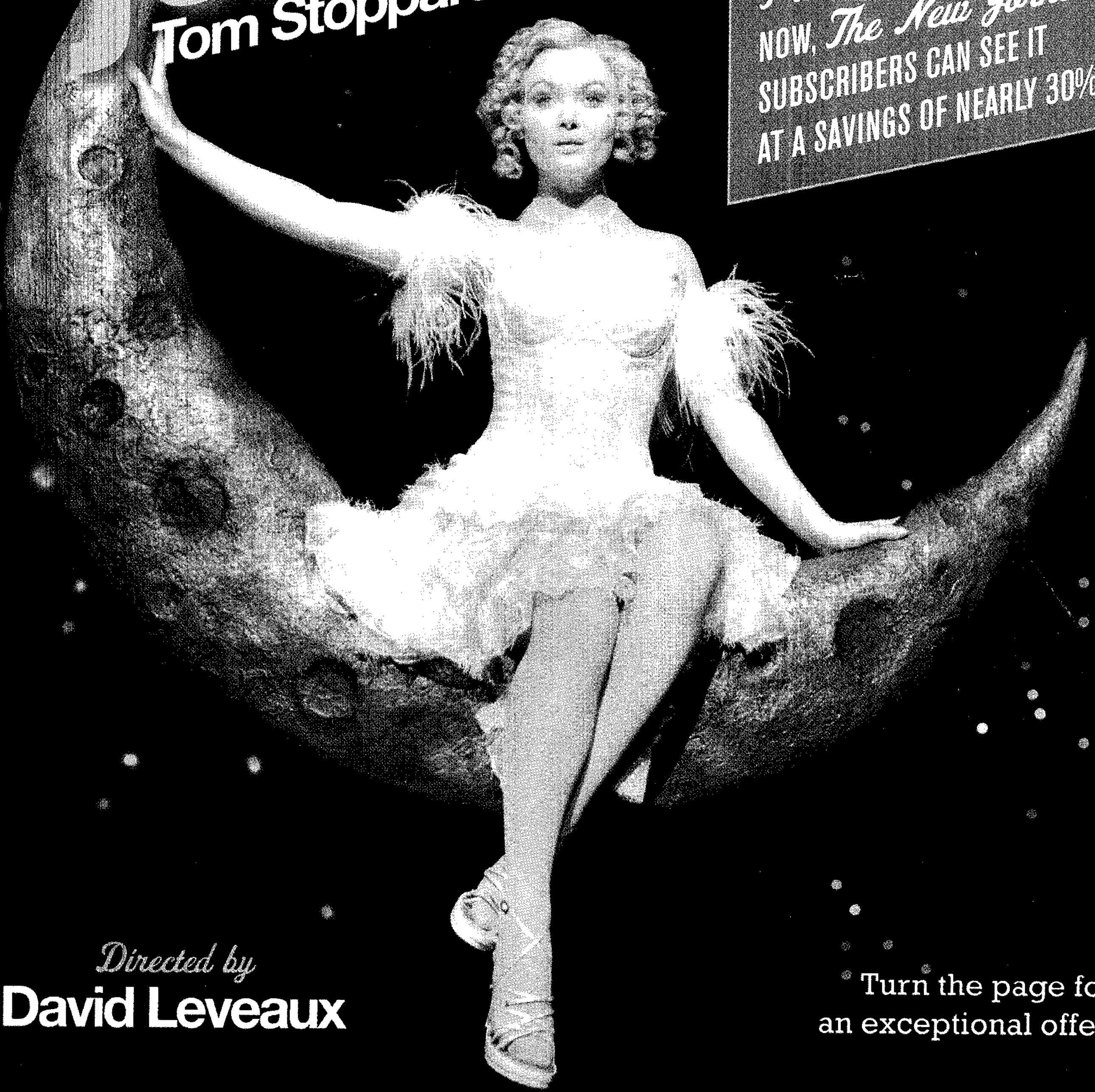

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The months pass. And it can't be long now. For us, and for the Next—so ceaselessly are his bastions mined, his bunkers trip-wired, his bolt-holes booby-trapped.

Some doubles say that there have been worse times to be a double of Nadir's. Years ago, before my arrival at the Palace of the End, he used to send them out to give fiery speeches in city squares, to parade invitingly in open limousines, to march at the head of ticker-tape tattoos. All, of course, were briskly assassinated, thus somewhat alleviating, for a short time (or so he felt), the danger posed to the Next.

Other doubles argue that there have been *better* times to be a double: when, for instance (this is Mekhlis), the doubles were asked to uphold their mercilessness as they moved from one wing to the other. The "pact with pain" theory. I remember those days, and the mental atmosphere was certainly very different.

Enmeshed in an atrocity-producing situation, the human being (according to Mekhlis) responds with one of two psychological strategies or mechanisms. The first is called "numbing." I remember numbing: like submission to a drug of deeply unwelcome and alien efficacy. The second strategy or mechanism, curiously, is called "doubling." That's what we all do now. There is the person of the morning, and then, following the period in the changing room, there is the person of the afternoon.

And the doubles *have* doubled. I think I can prove it. The laws of our country do not permit the execution of female virgins. Circumventing this stricture, by mass rape, used to be one of our perks. But ever since Nadir was shot in the face, and things changed so markedly, no double will have anything to do with the forced deflowerings; we leave all that to the bucket boys and poker-warmers and the other, humbler torturers of the Interrogation Wing.

The destiny of the failed double (one who repeatedly creeps in tears from the luxurious apartments, with his pointed slippers in his hand) is probably worth mentioning. Such a double must watch all his clan submit to the antic horror of the confessionals, but the double him-

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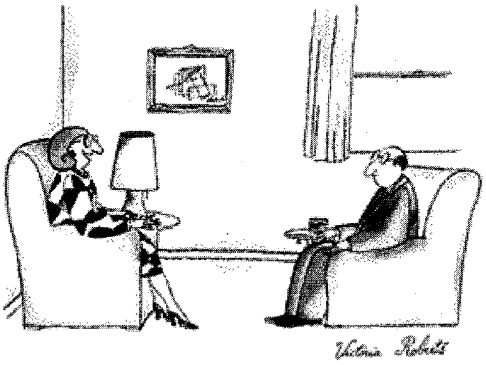

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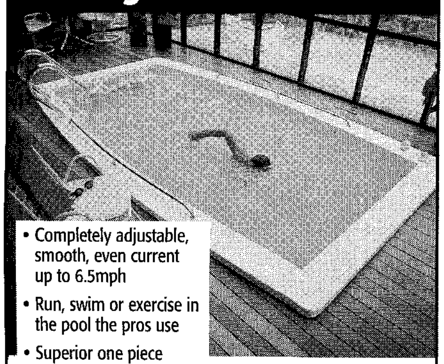

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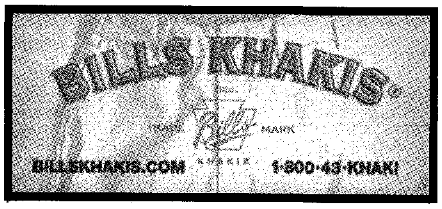

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self is dispatched by lethal injection—put to sleep, like a toothless dog. No further harm or disfigurement is visited on his body.

One day I was about to supervise the "de-gloving" of an elderly suspect when Mekhlis, in contravention of a major ground rule (doubles are never to appear plurally in the Interrogation Wing), drew me aside and, in a thick, hiccuppy whisper, passed on the rumor of the latest attempt on Nadir. I had just started to work, and so there were several anxious hours to endure before I limped into the doubles' commissary at twelve-forty-five.

There are only six doubles now. Some have died from complications arising from their more recent injuries (the bazooka attack); some have taken their own lives. Many, after grimly monotonous failure, have attracted the special execration of the Next. . . . Because, you see, Nadir is impotent. He has ever been impotent. All his grown life, helpless, as in a dream, surrounded by women he could do nothing with.

Rumor, where there is no settled truth, stops feeling like rumor: briefly but palpably, it feels far more convincing than any immutable fact. . . . It was at first believed, in the doubles' commissary, that we would lose a foot, an arm, an ear, the other eye. (The other eye—what would that spell for our tasks of the afternoon? We could continue. But why would he want us to?) It seemed that he had been bayonetted in the guts, poleaxed in the throat, harpooned in the mouth. We spoke with unusual license (and the room was, of course, an aviary of mobile phones), because we could cast off the resilient superstition that Nadir was among us. Nadir was not among us; he was fighting for his life in one of the futuristic Presidential hospitals. Could the doctors be trusted? Or would they deliberately bungle their work, as they had with our recent tracheostomies and cerebral trephinations? At one-fifty-five, we received three independent reports that confirmed our worst fear: the Next, while crossing the Oder-Haff by submarine, had, like his father, fallen victim to the dreaded toilet bomb.

In the changing room, I sat on the bench, wearing the colossal canopy of my kimono; at my feet, the pointed slippers; by my side, the tasselled tarboosh. I was wondering, as I always do at this time of day, why the body's genius for pain so easily outstrips its fitful talent for pleasure; wondering why the pretty trillings of the bedroom are so easily silenced by the inconceivable vociferation of the Interrogation Wing; wondering why the spasms and archings of orgasm are so easily rendered inert and insensible when compared to the contortions of torture, jagged and instantaneous, like lightning. You "respond" to *that*, and no mistake; there's never any need to get them into the right mood. And consider how pain can be made to proliferate: where is the role, in the realm of pleasure, for the three-year-old daughter?

It is all over now, anyway. Nadir the Next will join Old Nadir in the spaceship of permanent intensive care, his center of gravity replaced by a raw hollow. Whether he lives or dies, the fetish of verisimilitude will draw each double to the sandbagged cell and its rigged toilet bowl (with the limpet mine tucked under the U-bend), and the surgical team standing by.

This afternoon in the Palace of the End I shall strive, as Nadir's proxy or prosthesis, to be ever more tremulously tender. I think I understand this gravitation of the Next's: the tendency to the tender, in the Recreation Wing. I can empathize with him, after all—and I feel something like a hard vacuum in the side of our heads where our eye used to be. But I am not the Next. I am only his double, and my half of it reads like this. When you have been hurt yourself, you don't want to hurt anyone. When you love something so intimately fragile as your own body, you don't want to hurt anyone. That's what I say to myself in the changing room. Please let me not have to hurt anyone. ♦

From the Miami Herald.

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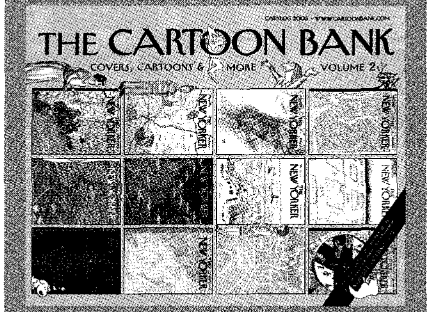

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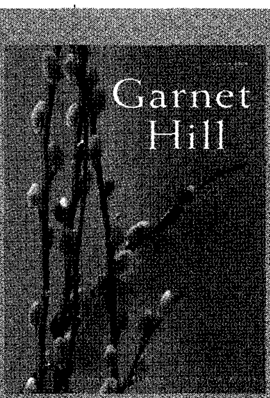

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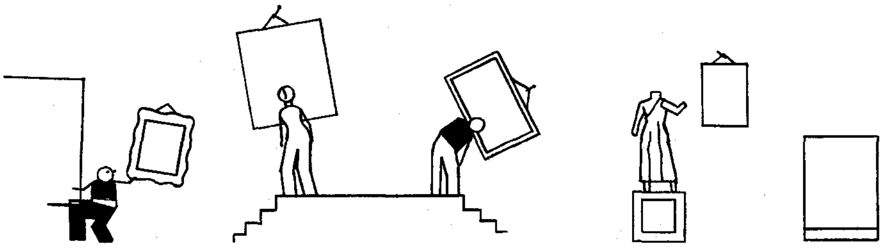

THE WAYWARD PRESS

BLAIR HOUSE

The former Times reporter strikes back.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

One short year ago, Jayson Blair was, for all that readers of the *Times* knew, a reporter in good standing, and Howell Raines was the paper's triumphantly successful, though not well-loved, executive editor. The rather abrupt pace of journalistic history in this case is worth keeping in mind, because Blair has just published a memoir that is sure to set off a great reconsideration of last spring's succession of dramatic events at the *Times:* Blair's resignation, the paper's printed exposure of his amazingly extensive journalistic misdeeds, and the resignations of the paper's top two news executives, Raines and Gerald M. Boyd, the managing editor. In theory, the publication of a book should mean that the event it's about is ready for a full, wise assessment. That is not the case for the Jayson Blair scandal, partly because it's still too soon, and partly because of the nature of the book. Only ten months after his resignation, Blair has produced a full-length work that you can hold in your hands. If you subtract however long it took to negotiate the contract and physically create the book, it appears that Blair must have written it in a few weeks. Of course, Blair never had a problem in being rapidly and copiously productive.

Inescapably, it's a quickie book. It feels padded; there are many brief chapters, some of which are recitations of the sort of reportorial adventures that are fine as after-work barroom anecdotes but fall short of book-worthiness. It is less than scrupulously edited ("One learns from their environs, particularly when it comes to the priorities"). The bits we've all been waiting for, where Blair begins faking stories, don't start until two-thirds of the way through. The larger issues that Blair's story raises—the nature of Raines's reign, the *Times'* vulnerability to fraud, the question of whether Blair's being black had to do with the scandal—don't synch very well with the book itself. It's a curio, an artifact, an unprocessed download from Blair's brain—vivid, wired, serviceably written and paced, and, in a way, more interesting for its artlessness. Here, you feel, is the real Blair, not a Lillian Hellman-like fully imagined and realized character who happens to share the memoirist's name.

The most obvious example of Blair's appealing lack of authorial control is that, in calling the book "Burning Down My Masters' House" (which must have beaten out "Confessions of Nat Timesman"), he seems to be putting forth the view that the whole affair was about race—to be precise, old-fashioned white racism, with him as victim, rather than a racial dynamic engendered by affirmative action, through which he benefitted. But in the text he can never quite stay on message, and he winds up presenting a story whose racial angle is about as complicated and undidactic as race relations actually are. Blair grew up in suburbs all over the country, some integrated and some not. His father works for the federal government, and his mother is a schoolteacher. He appears to feel quite comfortable around white people and they around him—his world, as he describes it, isn't all that far from being a paradise of diversity in which everyone gets to be ethnically identified and proud of it and can interact richly and unselfconsciously with members of other groups. Some of Blair's best friends are white, and some of his most complicated relationships are with blacks. His (very small) superego seems to want his downfall to contain a lesson for us all about discrimination, but his promotion of this thesis is mainly confined to dutiful-sounding transitional passages at the ends of chapters—for instance, his hope for an "order where I was not a pawn in a game because of my race."

Actually, if you wanted to put Blair into a category, it would be Major Head Case. And his book would be more appropriately shelved under Recovery (except that he doesn't recover) than under African-American Studies—or, for that matter, under Journalism. He is, he tells us, a childhood sexual-abuse victim, an alcoholic, a cocaine addict, a twelve-step-program graduate, and a man much counselled and therapized—at least once while clutching a Teddy bear. He hints that he has been on both sides of the drugs-for-sex equation. (As he somewhat cryptically puts it, "When I was on the performing end, it was usually implicit that it was for drugs. When I was on the receiving end, the reasons were under the surface, even if the surface was transparent and obvious.") He has that familiar addict's quality of being bracingly honest and aware of his faults but nonetheless incapable of behaving decently.

The life he led at the *Times* was recognizably that of an adrenalized young reporter: an unlived-in apartment, not much sleep, a work routine that blends ambulance chasing with crusading against injustice, late-night meaning-of-life sessions with friends. And yet even the prelapsarian Blair was pretty deeply lapsed. He would run up tabs of several hundred dollars at a Times Square bar and charge them to his expense account; the paper reimbursed him without a peep. He used a company car to cruise around with friends on weekends. He engaged in a variety of reporting practices that he

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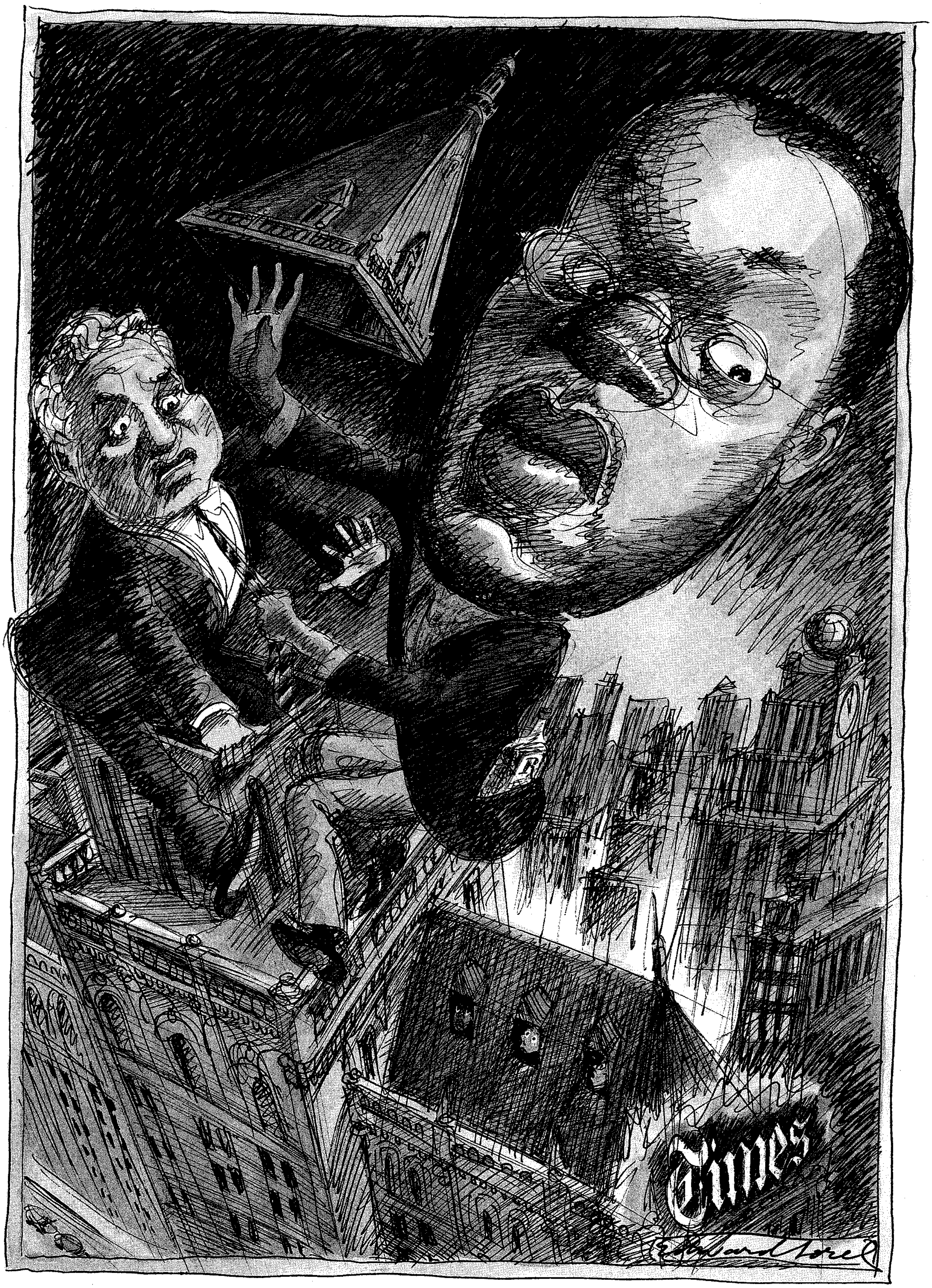
During the Raines era at the Times, the newsroom was like an engine being revved up past the red line on the tachometer.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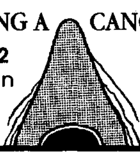

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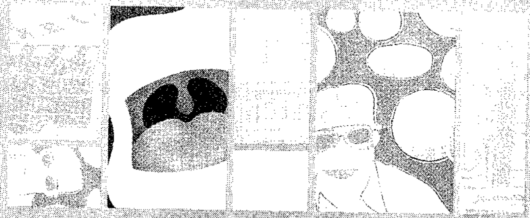
presents, wrongly, as standard-issue. He asked a public official he knew through his reporting to advise him on a friend's personal problem. He allowed himself to be seduced by a publicist, and returned the favor by plugging her client in the *Times*. He blew off meetings and lunches. He was a kind of journalism addict, using deadlines and bylines and travel as a way of keeping himself levitated slightly above the plane of reality. And that was before he became a full-fledged alcoholic, and then a man whose cocaine habit cost five hundred dollars a week or more. Once, he tells us, he was so desperate for a high that he snorted Alka-Seltzer.

Blair's official position is that he was mistreated by the *Times*, partly because of general organizational callousness, partly because of race. He doesn't seem to have his heart in it, though. His occasional accusatory passages come across as rote: "I wasn't going to fight for a job at a newspaper that had disappointed my idealism, for a newspaper that I had allowed to take something very precious from me." His editorial critique of the *Times* is familiar—that it pays more attention to the lives of its upper-middle-class readers and to "celebrity culture" than to poor people—but is undermined by some of his anecdotes (about enormous *Times* investments in stories concerned, for example, with American race relations and with the genocide in Rwanda). Unintentionally, he creates an impression of an organization that endlessly forgives an unforgivable employee. It isn't exactly clear why—distance isn't Blair's specialty—but it does seem too much of a stretch to say that it all happened because Blair is black. He was also charming, energetic, and a member of a race-transcendent type that was then in favor with management.

Everybody in journalism has read a memo that the *Times* high command sent staff members a couple of weeks ago, saying, in a way that must have piqued their curiosity as much as it reassured them, that an advance look at the book revealed that it contained "smears" of individual staffers. An efficient search for the smears is impossible because there's no index, but those who plow all the way through looking only for them will be disappointed. They are either pro forma ("Joyce had all the warmth and tenderness of a petrified piece of wood") or anonymous (in a couple of places, Blair says, without naming names, that he wasn't the only sinning reporter at the paper) or unpersuasive. The villain of "Burning Down My Masters' House" is supposed to be Jonathan Landman, the "insensitive" Metro editor and, for a while, Blair's boss, but it's hard to sign on to the idea that Landman's policy of keeping extra-close tabs on Blair was unwarranted, given Blair's account of himself. Blair gratuitously lists the names of a few *Times* employees who committed suicide or died mysteriously, but, if that's meant to exculpate him by demonstrating that the paper routinely crushes the spirit of people who work there, it doesn't. (His noting that the *Times* botched its coverage of the Holocaust doesn't have much exculpatory power, either.) Zingers that Blair seems to have written so that they will be quoted in reviews usually reveal him to be toweringly self-obsessed: "Perhaps if they had looked more carefully, people would have seen the storm raging inside me"; last May's long recapitulation in the *Times* of his journalistic sins "had been written and edited with no regard to the harm it might cause the one person who had the most to lose in the situation"—namely, Jayson Blair. At one point, he summons up his self-righteousness and reports, "A close friend in the newsroom had told me confidentially that being a recovering addict at the *Times* was bad enough, but that being a recovering black addict was something that many would not forgive me for any time soon." But even being given the opportunity to feel the subtle sting of one's bosses' unspoken disapproval for being a recovering addict sounds like a pretty good deal.

Such comments aren't representative of the book's over-all tone, though. Blair evidently does not have the ability to lie to himself about himself, and the gravamen of "Burning Down My Masters' House" doesn't have to do with the *Times* at all but with Blair's psychological condition, which he diagnoses, persuasively, as severe manic-depression. By the time of his downfall, last spring, he was off drugs and alcohol but was nonetheless delusional. He was holed up in an apartment in Brooklyn, armed with a cell phone and a laptop, writing fiction for the *Times*, having segued rapidly, in the rushed period after the September 11th



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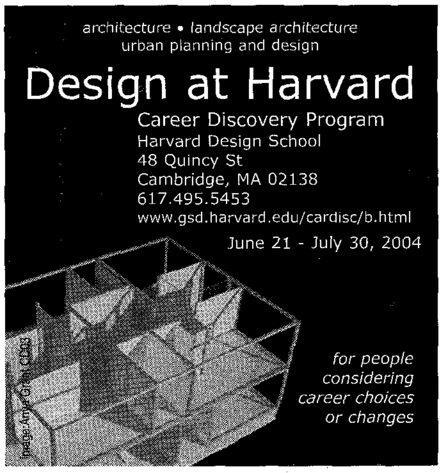
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attacks, from plagiarizing quotes to dropping all pretense and simply making stuff up. Once, near the end, his landlord burst in to his apartment, because Blair had forgotten to turn off the bathtub faucets and had flooded the building.

Blair's story is not unique to journalism. He is of a type with Nick Leeson, of Barings Bank, as well as with disgraced reporters like Janet Cooke, of the Washington *Post*, and Stephen Glass, of *The New Republic*. Established institutions that disseminate information, operate on trust, hire lots of ambitious young people who work under minimal supervision, and ask their employees to produce spectacular results are highly vulnerable to the rogue-employee problem. Although it's hard to imagine anybody being more spectacularly screwed-up than Jayson Blair, the idea that no organization could have protected itself against someone so charming and pathological won't do as an excuse. A set of common conditions runs through the famous fraud cases. The place where they occur is usually undergoing some kind of category shift in its mission, which makes the safeguards that were invented for the old mission insufficient.

The *Times*, like a lot of daily newspapers, has got closer to being a daily magazine over the last generation, especially in the use of narrative techniques in stories. It does less in the way of reciting yesterday's events than it used to, and it is less intensely focussed on the doings of government officials and other powerful personages. Under the Raines regime, evidently, the newsroom was like an engine being revved up past the red line on the tachometer. There was an endlessly demanding monster story: the September 11th aftermath. Because of an institutional predilection against joint bylines, lots of reporters were doing anonymous work on other people's stories. If this induced an overpowering craving for credit, well, it could be slaked if you produced spectacular, colorful material. The paper now seemed to favor ungovernable, flamboyantly non-Ivy League reporters like Blair and his friends. People were being moved around from section to section. And fraud-enabling technology—mobile telephones, electronic filing of stories from non-geographical addresses, online access to vast, pilferable stores of words and pictures about any subject—had made a great leap forward. With Blair in particular, you can imagine the case being made for him in editors' meetings: he was a wildly energetic and fearless street reporter who would go anywhere and talk to anybody, and he could phone in his stuff to the desk where soberer heads could tame it. All of that produced both the temptation and the possibility of writing stories from the field that were too good to be true, but good enough for the front page.

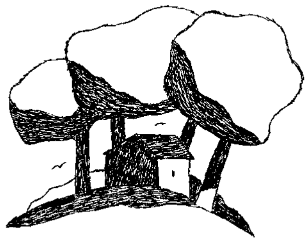
Blair's only really telling charge against the *Times* is that the national desk encouraged a practice called the "toe-touch," in which a reporter would make a pro-forma visit to a remote location so that the already written story could bear a dateline. (Toe-touching is one of the sins that led to the departure from the paper of one of Blair's heroes, Rick Bragg.) Blair himself, as he nicely puts it, escalated from the toe-touch story to the "no-touch" story, written from Brooklyn under a made-up dateline. It was the exposure of one such story of Blair's, set in Los Fresnos, Texas, that caused the whole place to unravel.

There are ways to prevent future Jayson Blair scandals. A newspaper organization can change its incentive structure so that employees don't feel that the only thing really valued is what's known in the trade as a "holy shit!" story, and it can devise better ways to police itself. I have a suggestion for the *Times* and other big newspapers: establish a guerrilla team of fact checkers who perform random prepublication reviews of a small percentage of stories. It would be insuperably expensive and logistically impossible for a daily paper to check every story before publication, the way magazines do. But most of the journalism scandals involve a certain type of story, a vivid feature from an exotic location. If reporters knew that every once in a while somebody would pluck a story of this kind out of the in-type list and talk to all the people quoted (that didn't happen, by the way, in the Stephen Glass case), it would have a powerful effect. Certainly it would have more preventive power than setting up broader avenues for after-publication complaints, like the *Times'* new "public editor" position. God is not going to stop making charismatic maniacs, so it falls to newspapers to figure out how to do a better job of apprehending them. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Disarming Iraq, *by Hans Blix (Pantheon; $24).* The former chief United Nations weapons inspector has been called everything from an Iraqi stooge to a Western spy, and his judicious account of the prelude to the Iraq war is punctuated by anger. Blix feels that he was caught between two sides that had lost touch with reality. The White House, ready for war, made "absurd" demands; the Iraqis, consumed by resentment, seemed not to realize the seriousness of their situation. Initially, Blix's "gut feelings" were that Iraq was hiding something; later, he was haunted by the idea that there was nothing to find and dismayed by the paucity of evidence. On the other hand, he writes, "considering how misleading much of the intelligence given us eventually proved to be, perhaps it was a blessing that we did not get more." He now believes that the weapons were probably destroyed years ago—in other words, that inspections worked. In any case, Blix is glad that he and his colleagues resisted endorsing the hawks' position: "What would the reputation of international inspection be today if we had simply said 'amen'?"

Somerset Maugham, *by Jeffrey Meyers (Knopf; $30).* A plainspoken craftsman of short stories and popular novels, and a dramatist, screenwriter, and essayist, Somerset Maugham had one of the most versatile—and lucrative—careers of any literary writer of the twentieth century. He also had an eventful life; during the First World War, he served as a British agent, and his travels took him to the Far East and the South Seas, where much of his best work is set. Despite his cosmopolitan sheen and his financial success—he lived in style on the French Riviera—he suffered at the hands of critics; Edmund Wilson dismissed him as a "half-trashy novelist." Meyers, however, mounts a persuasive defense of Maugham's art, keenly mapping his influence on V. S. Naipaul, George Orwell, and Paul Theroux.



The Lucky Ones, *by Rachel Cusk (Fourth Estate; $24.95).* The women in these five linked vignettes are all connected to a journalist named Serena Porter, either personally or as readers of the weekly column she writes about her family life. While they struggle to understand their painful and awkward responses to lovers and children, she spins the raw material of motherhood and marriage into witty and topical dispatches. Of course, much of what Serena writes is factitious, both in its details (she freely appropriates an acquaintance's experience as her own) and in the breezy complacency that it projects; Cusk seems to suggest that our true thoughts about love and family defy articulation. Such is her gift for capturing women's psychology and their sense of their place in the world that the novel achieves what Serena's column cannot: a fresh and compassionate portrait of a generation's feelings about motherhood.

Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination and the Construction of the Underworld, *by Clayton Eshleman (Wesleyan; $29.95).* This arresting diptych of verse and philosophical prose charts a twenty-five-year obsession with the prehistoric cave paintings of southwestern France. The region's enigmatic art work, dating from the Upper Paleolithic era, has been a constant muse for Eshleman, whose wildly discursive style mirrors the superimposed scenes of animal herds and shamanistic figures that populate the cave walls. Breathless accounts of cave exploration appear in counterpoint with poems in eerily primordial voices. Although his thesis that all art results from the separation anxiety between human and animal is unpersuasive, there is an impressive exuberance to his efforts to trace back to this common source everything from Greek myth to Allen Ginsberg. For Eshleman, it seems, the artist's imaginative predicament is something of a cave itself, both maze and refuge.

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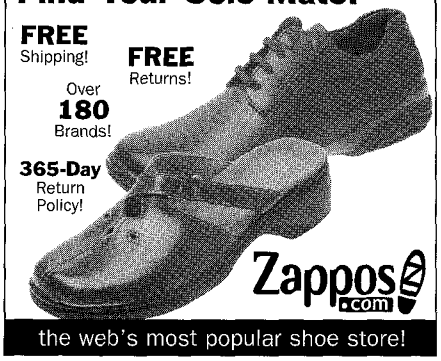

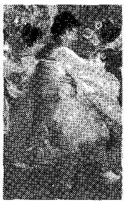

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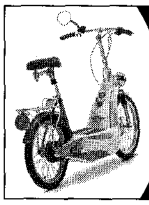

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IN FASHION

ROOTS

African-American hair stylists get creative in L.A.

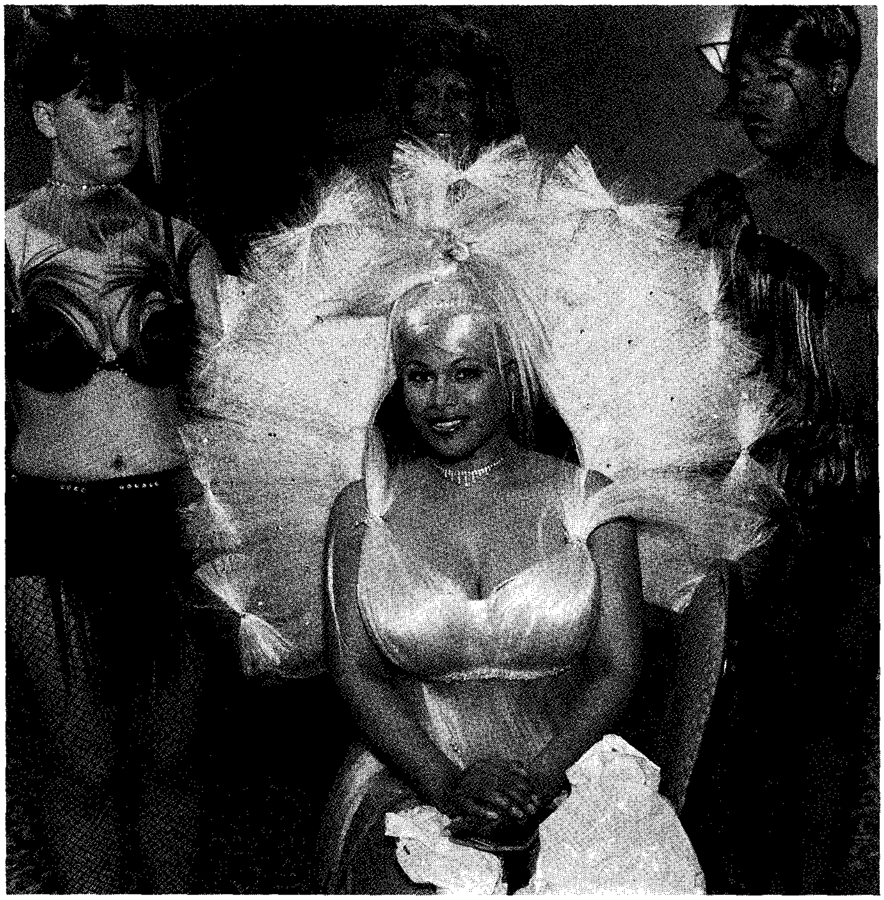
BY JUDITH THURMAN

My father had a secretary named Barbara who kept his books and managed his life for twenty years. I don't think he knew much about her, except that she lived in Brooklyn with a diabetic sister and had a son in the Army. The son was a decorated soldier whom I never met, though he figured in the violent arguments that I had with my father, in the late sixties, about his conviction that Kissinger's "domino theory" was a necessary evil, and mine that anyone who subscribed to it was a war criminal. Barbara had always processed her hair, which she wore in a pageboy, à la Coretta Scott King—a rigid helmet as highly polished as a walnut breakfront. Then one Monday, without warning, she came to work in an Afro. My father looked up from the *Times* and choked on his Danish. "For God's sake," he sputtered. "What did you do to yourself? You look like a Zulu!" To which she replied, "It's 1968, Bill, and that's the idea."

I was, in those days, still setting my own spongy curls on jumbo toilet-paper rolls in a futile effort to transform mohair into corn silk, and, reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," I had been humbled to learn about the more extreme mortifications practiced by black people in order "to look 'pretty,'" as Malcolm puts it, "by white standards." In the early nineteen-forties, he arrived in Boston to seek his fortune—a naïve young man from Lansing, Michigan, whose "kinky, reddish hair was cut hick style." To help him acquire the veneer of a hipster while saving a few bucks at the barbershop, a friend named Shorty gave Malcolm a list of the ingredients and gear that they would need to cook up some homemade "congolene," then showed him how to do it.

"A jelly-like, starchy-looking glop," writes Alex Haley, to whom Malcolm X narrated his memoir, resulted from pouring half a can of Red Devil lye over two white potatoes, peeled and sliced. Shorty whipped in a couple of raw eggs, and the lye heated up the Mason jar they were using as a receptacle. He then coated Malcolm's scalp, neck, and ears with vaseline, and worked the mixture through his hair. "My head caught fire," Malcolm recalled. "I gritted my teeth and tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together. The comb felt as if it was raking my skin off." Even after the congolene was rinsed out, the fiery sensation persisted, but there had been a "staggering" transformation in Malcolm's appearance. He had a "thick, smooth sheen of shining red hair . . . as straight as any white man's." This initiation to conking—a back-seat deflowering, of sorts—persuaded Malcolm that if black people "gave the brains in their heads just half as much attention as they do their hair, they would be a thousand times better off."

One of the small ironies of black history is that the modest sums spent by millions of people on "dekinking" their hair represented a significant chunk of capital that stayed in the community and enriched its small entrepreneurs. Even before the Civil War, the hair business provided the single most important source of a middle-class income and a respectable life of relative ease for men and women who were once, or whose parents had been, slaves, and whose likeliest avenues of employment were manual labor and domestic service. The most spectacular of their success stories—and a lightning rod for the controversies about class, race, and identity that have historically dogged the enterprise of dressing black hair—is that of Sarah Breedlove, who became Madam C. J. Walker. Breedlove, according to "On Her Own Ground," a biography by A'Lelia Bundles (the subject's great-



Costumes and a headdress of human hair designed by Infamous Lisa B for Hump the Grinder's Hair Wars' Tenth Anniversary Show in Los Angeles, January 11, 2004.

THOMAS KERN/LOOKAT

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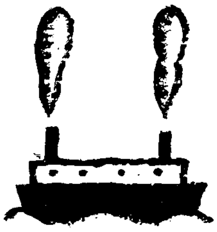
great-granddaughter), was born in 1867 to a couple who sharecropped in Louisiana. Until she was in her late thirties, she earned her living as a laundress and cook in St. Louis. Her life was hard, her diet poor, her hygiene as sketchy as the plumbing, and her hair had begun falling out. A thicket of legend obscures this larval stage of Walker's self-invention, but she probably sought treatment from a well-known local aesthetician—Annie Pope-Turnbo—who had a substantial interstate business selling tonics and restorers, and who later employed Breedlove as a sales agent. Walker, however, preferred to claim that the formula that cured her baldness, and which contained, she said, secret ingredients imported from Africa, had come to her—after much prayer—in a dream.

As Breedlove's hair flourished, so did she. In 1906, she married her third husband, the flashy and charming C. J. Walker, and, about the same time, launched her own line of products. Whatever their provenance, and whether or not they really grew hair (glossy, relaxed shafts seem longer than woolly ones, but she also addressed her clients' underlying scalp problems by prescribing more frequent shampooing, better nutrition, and massage), they did grow money. By the time of her death, in 1919, Madam Walker was one of the richest and most admired African-Americans in the country: a philanthropist; a crusader against lynching; and a marketing genius of world renown who laid the groundwork for transforming the cottage industry of black hair into what it has become—a multibillion-dollar business. She was also, later critics charged, a parvenue who wallowed in a life of wretched excess that she financed by catering to her customers' sense of racial inferiority.



Most beauty products and advertising—whoever their target—cater to a sense of insecurity, and to an enduring belief in miracles from a jar. The jars now contain ever more potent promises of transformation, as the old taboos against the hubris of trying to improve on nature are, like nature herself, everywhere on the defensive. We tamper casually with our bodies, our faces, our brain chemistry, and our metabolisms. Mass marketing of this vast cosmetic and genetic revolution is altering the notion of identity, and of where and in what it resides. The more appearance means, the less it signifies. Wrinkles no longer define age. Clothes no longer define class or gender. Hair no longer defines race, or not as dialectically as it used to, with blacks anxious to look whiter at one extreme and Malcolm X's austere contempt for anything but "God-created" hair at the other. African-American barbershops and hair salons are now hotbeds of anarchic and confident self-expression.

The free spirits of the hair world convened in January at the Los Angeles Airport Radisson Hotel to attend Hump the Grinder's Hair Wars 10-Year Anniversary & California Hair Grammys. Hump the Grinder is the stage name of David Humphries, who is also sometimes called "the Don King of black hair entertainment." We first met in 2002, at Deitch Projects, a SoHo gallery, where a few of his stylists were participating in—and stealing—a show of fashion as performance art. Their espaliers of hair were as fanciful as the topiary in a Baroque garden or the headgear of Mardi Gras queens. (Here one should probably note that the world of black hair is not predominantly gay. Flamboyance, as Dennis Rodman liked to demonstrate somewhat pedantically with his tonsorial antics on the basketball court, can be a measure of conspicuous virility.) Humphries is a soft-spoken, forty-seven-year-old former teacher and copywriter who wears his own grizzled locks conservatively cropped, and who is probably the last contestant you would pick out of a lineup as the impresario of an entertainment that features, among other novelties, hair shrubbery, helipads, spiderwebs, tires, and lingerie.

The idea for the spectacle that Hair Wars became occurred to Humphries in the nineteen-eighties, when he was working as a d.j. in his native Detroit. "I used to give a lot of gimmick parties in the clubs," he told me. "Hair was really happening, and I thought, Let's get exotic with it. Detroit hair was always famous for its edge, probably because it's a predominantly black city, and people were more comfortable trying things that only high-school kids elsewhere had the nerve for." The popularity of the early performances emboldened him to "take the concept on the road" and to promote it like a rap tour.

The show, which travels to some ten cities a year, is primarily a runway extravaganza, but it's also a trade fair and a convention of hair designers. Performing stylists, who pay for the privilege, compete for what Humphries calls "bragging rights." Each headliner creates an extravagantly coiffed and costumed vaudeville skit, with song and dance, to showcase his or her virtuosity. These often inspired but sometimes cockamamie production numbers call to mind the artier experiments at a high-school science fair—homemade volcanoes, Rube Goldberg kitchen gadgets, and miniature ecosystems—but endowed with the sex appeal of a music video. The models are, in most cases, amateurs recruited from among the stylists' friends and staff, and many are refreshingly ultra-Venusian. Their diversity of shape makes that inhuman and homogeneous regularity of beauty from which there is no relief or appeal in mainstream magazines, or at the collections, seem insipid.

While I was waiting to check in at the Radisson, I noticed a figure ahead of me in line who, among the nondescript budget travellers clutching the hands of cranky toddlers, was as fabulous as some temple idol from ancient Nineveh. The outré splendor of his garb suggested that we were registering for the same event, and I mustered the courage to introduce myself. He was Big Bad D—the sponsor of Hair Wars—a forty-two-year-old, three-hundred-pound, six-foot-four-inch hair stylist, bodybuilder, salon owner, magazine publisher (of a new periodical entitled *Bobby Pin*), and billboard star. He is also the C.E.O. of BBD Products—a company that manufactures expensive hair-growth enhancers. D considers his hair, as many African and Rastafarian men also do, a talisman of his power, so he never cuts it. A thick fascicle of dreadlocks sheathed in wax thread is slung rakishly over his right shoulder and spliced to an equally long but spindlier cable of beard. (The logistics of dressing and safely performing other activities of a strenuous or intimate nature with head

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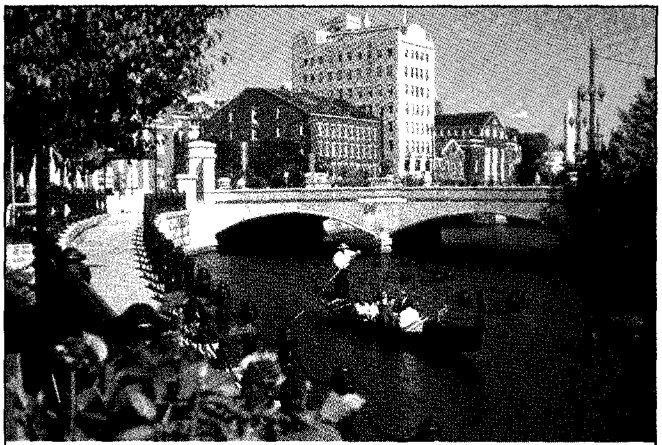

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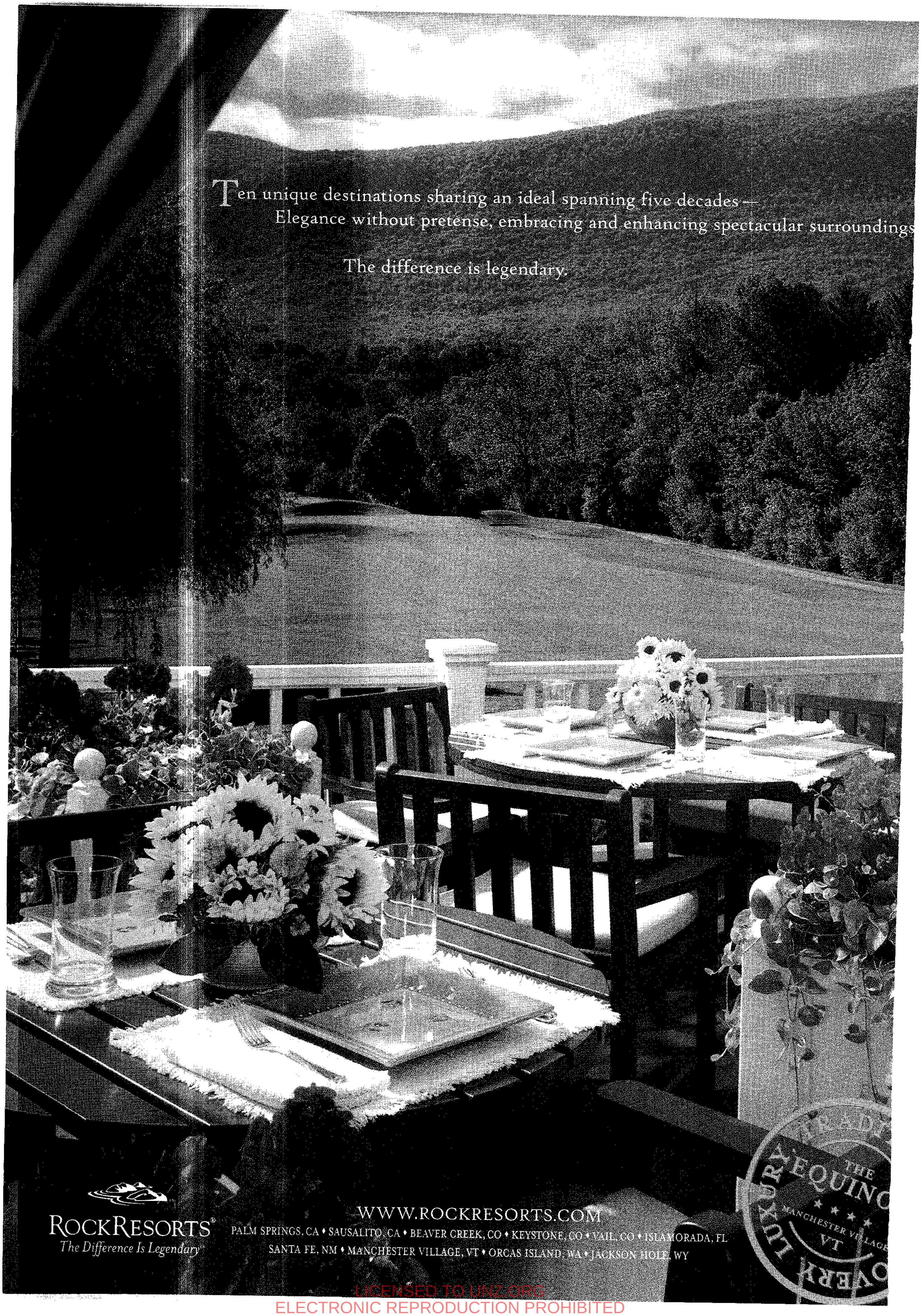
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and chin umbilically attached are, he admits, sometimes challenging.)

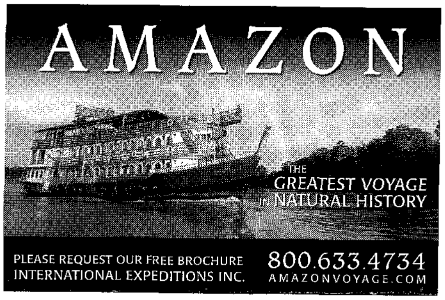
That afternoon, D was dressed in an ensemble worthy of Galliano: a pair of high-waisted, patchwork leather samurai pants evocative in pizzazz and volume of a Montgolfier; a red T-shirt inlaid with gold and gems that was slashed to display his awesome pectorals; a belt of scarified alligator skin, with claws still attached, from which hung a pouch containing, he said, freeze-dried gator meat; a rawhide "coolie" hat adorned with stones, pods, and shells; and some fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, including a bracelet of hazelnut-size beads and a ring, about four inches wide, shaped like a pair of scissors. "I've stopped counting carats," he told me with the offhand shrug of a gourmand who has thrown out his bathroom scale. "I design my own jewelry and clothes, and my style is a blend of Asian and African, but it's mostly inspired by Conan"—the Barbarian. D's priestly gravity of manner belies his mad maximalism of dress, and there is something about him of the discreet coupé in an action film that suddenly revs up and speeds off, morphing into a silvery hot rod bristling with lethal accessories.

The hair business has been lucrative for D, and he owns a mansion on eleven acres in Detroit and an estate in Jamaica. "My typical customer spends about three hundred and fifty dollars a month on treatments and styling," he told me. "That's probably as much as on her car payments. We do a lot more to our hair than the average Caucasian. African-American hair care is a five-billion-dollar-a-year industry, and we outspend whites by about three to one. It used to be that the products were manufactured by black-owned companies, but almost all of them have been bought up by the big conglomerates, or undersold by them and forced out of business. Mine is an exception."

D's underdog tenacity in the business world suits him for his role as the patron of a show that, if only because of the concentrated talent and enterprise that it represents, has become an important ethnic-pride event. Most of the participants are too young to remember, or were not born yet, when "Black Is Beautiful" was a radical slogan. They take it, if not for granted, then as a self-evident truth. But the show's regal m.c., LaToya Pearson (a prize-winning stylist now retired from salon work), has a long memory. Pearson is a churchgoing grandmother of sixty-two whose high cheekbones, strong chin, and blond wig give her a faint resemblance, at least from the neck up, to Cher. "I have a gift," she notes, for "extemporaneous public speaking," and her commentary mixes a little "tasteful" rap and discreet promotion with "lots of appreciation" for the performers, though she won't tolerate "lewdness or profanity." Pearson's father was a black Jew, and she learned her trade in "a multicultural setting, doing everything from the bubble, the beehive, the gypsy curl, and the Farrah Fawcett flip" to her trophy-winning "Moonlanding" coif (an electrified globe of hair pocked with the craters of a lunar landscape and skewered by a silver rocket).

Having come this far, Pearson would like to see the domain of black hair reviewed less exclusively from a "politically correct" perspective. Styling, in her view, is an art, "like portraiture," that channels emotion and celebrates individuality. "When I was young, it wasn't just nappy hair that was unacceptable," she recalls. "Color out of a bottle was for 'loose' women, and I would have caught heck from my pastor for looking as I do today. Braids on adults were even more controversial. Now, of course, they're everywhere—on people of all ages and races, and you have to believe that's progress."

In their suppleness, braids are, perhaps, an emblem of the changes that have taken place since the sixties in attitudes not only toward black hair but toward the potential for mobility in every sphere. There are almost no limits on what you can do with them or what they can mean. The braids of an old-fashioned schoolgirl were accessories of her nubile virtue, but braids are also symbols of strength (sinews are a form of plait)—even of ferocity. It is not a coincidence that military uniforms are decorated with braid, or the heads of N.B.A. stars with cornrows. In Africa, as among Africans of the diaspora, braiding pays homage, intentionally or not, to ideals of valor and fertility, and to patterns probably as ancient as the first woven textiles and works of art. Braiding is also, as D observed, a "huge profit-maker" for the black-hair business—"about thirty per cent of it"—in part because the process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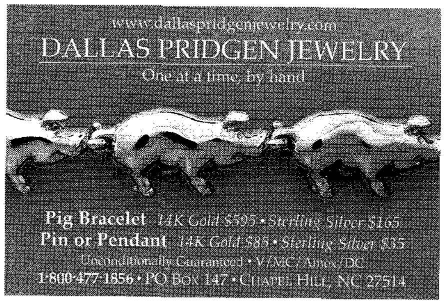
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is so labor-intensive and, in other parts, because elaborate styles often involve costly weaves; braids stress the scalp and hair shafts, so they require a battery of conditioners; and, like jeans, they are a genderless fashion staple that never seems tired or prosaic.

Nina Ann Garner, the owner of Hair Underground, is a specialist in weaves and individual dreads (which resemble tiny chenille caterpillars), and Tsega Tesfamariam is a braider admired for her finesse and speed. On the afternoon of the show, they were at work in their hotel room on a crew of male, female, and child models. Tesfamariam is only twenty-two and has been braiding hair professionally since she was eight. She learned the art from her grandmother in their native Eritrea. Cornrows, she explained, are tightly plaited kernels of short hair that hug the contours of the scalp. Microbraids have the fluidity of willow branches, or the cascades of fine jets from a fountain. Like the more leonine or pharaonic styles (and one often sees working women on the subway or shoppers at the supermarket whose hairdos are identical to those in Sumerian bas-reliefs), they are often achieved with extensions, which is to say, help from someone else's head.

The demand for high-quality human hair has revived a trade that flourished for centuries: girls and women, now mostly in Asia, selling their crowning glories for the price of a trousseau, a vacation, dental work, school fees, or a VCR. Tesfamariam's dexterity is prodigious. She wields a rattail comb with mechanical rapidity, separating the hair into sections no thicker than a feather of eyelash. In about an hour, she had embellished the shapely crown of a swanlike maiden with an intricate fretwork of flawlessly symmetrical black starbursts.

Hair Wars is still a fringe happening—covered sporadically on local television, or on programs like "The Ricki Lake Show"—and there were no paparazzi, red carpet, or Joan Rivers in the lobby of the Radisson to hype the Grammys and greet the stars, among them the belles of Hair Erotica; Mike-Mike & Baby Boy, from Head Bangers; Giorgi-O, of Beverly Hills; the L.A. Braid Queen; Von Jour Reece; Dontae Dupree, of Hair Traffic Control; Infamous Lisa B.; the magisterial Kevin Carter, celebrated for his elegant spider women and hair flowers; and Steven Noss, who bills himself as "Tha Baddest Whyte Boy in Tha Hair Business" (he is the only white boy in Hair Wars). Noss, who hails from Pittsburgh, is the engineer of a crowd-pleasing "hairy copter" that takes off from a deck of braids. Like Lisa B., he specializes in faintly surreal "hair couture," which has nothing in common with the macabre ornaments, tatted from the tresses of a defunct loved one, that Victorians once hung in their drawing rooms. His collection of bras, miniskirts, and ruffled gowns is inspired, he says, "by Barbie and Bob Mackie." One might describe them as hairshirts for the terminally unrepentant.

The coach in Humphries prides himself on discipline and punctuality, so the show started, as scheduled, at five past six, the first acts playing to a semi-deserted ballroom. D was impassively resplendent in a crimson-and-gold kimono. A camera crew directed by the filmmaker Regina Kimbell was shooting footage for a documentary entitled "My Nappy Roots: A Journey Through Our Hair-itage," and after the Grammys were presented by Ms. Color-Me-Vic, a stylist from Columbus, Ohio, whose rainbow-tinted poodle cut and three-inch fingernails have been televised on "Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not," I met Kimbell backstage. The hair industry, in her view, is rallying African-Americans to shake off the fetters of their subservience to unattainable ideals of Caucasian beauty. It is, she says, "the business of liberation."

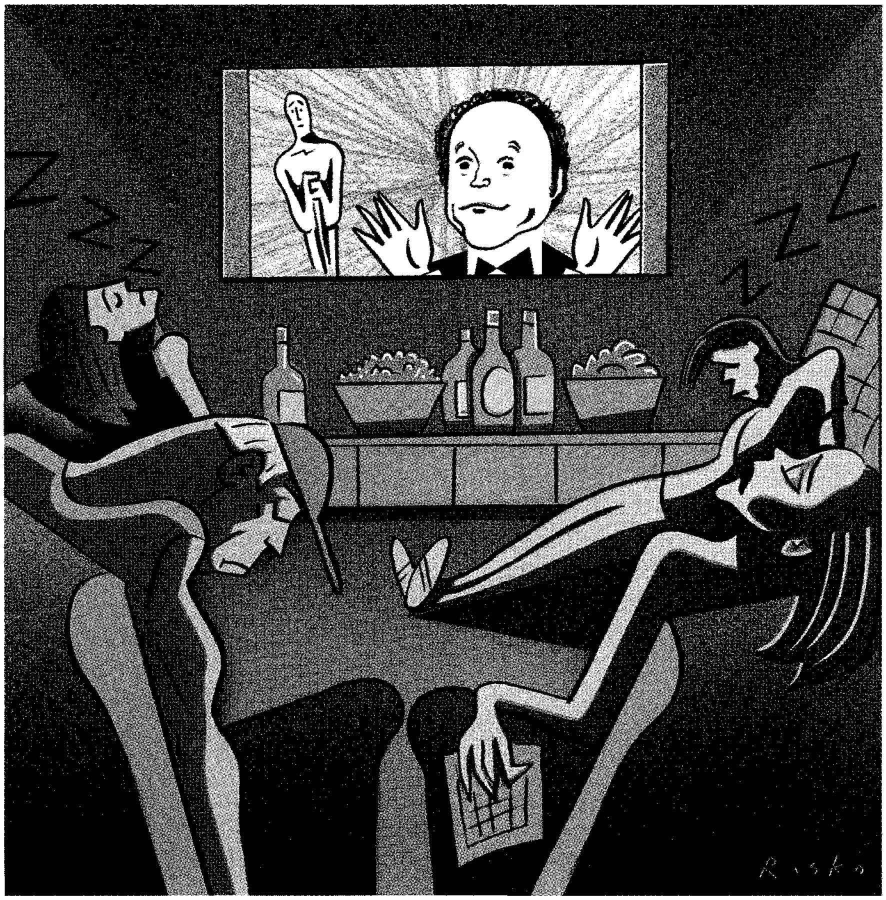
When the hot buffet materialized, so did the audience. Of a thousand people or so, no one I noticed (except Humphries) wore a natural. Both off and on the runway, there were wavy weaves; feather cuts; lightning-bolt bangs; punky spikes; ponytails; twists; dreads; knots; bristles; corkscrew curls; crimping; radical asymmetry; exotic color (hot pink and blue); an assortment of pinecone- and ziggurat-shaped finials; and heads on which neat cornrows exploded into fantails of frizz, like a terrace of cultivated paddies ringed by a forest of bamboo. But one of the most popular fashions was a thick, smooth sheen of shining red hair—bone straight, like Malcolm's. ♦

ON TELEVISION

DECENT EXPOSURE

Spontaneity boycotts the Oscars.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



And the Oscar for best sedative goes to . . . the Academy Awards.

ROBERT RISKO

My editors wanted me to say something about the Academy Awards broadcast, but, afraid that in response to their request I might—either accidentally or accidentally on purpose—expose a body part, they imposed an eight-day delay on me. In the end, I behaved as impeccably as a losing Oscar nominee. Now, before we get to the substance of the evening, let's review who I was wearing that night: a light-brown cashmere sweater by Giorgio Lands' Enda evoking the color of the M&M's that were discontinued a few years ago in favor of blue; a flowered blouse by Liberté de London, bought ten years ago in Glasgow, the couture capital of Scotland; jeans by the House of Gap; and, in a nod to old-time Hollywood glamour, vintage brown loafers by the eccentric fashion genius Ann Taylor. Jewels—small gold hoop earrings (O.K., gold*ish*)—were by Madame Filene, bought at the celebrity discount of fourteen dollars.

Long before the first air kisses were exchanged at the post-ceremony Governors Ball, Oscar buzz had already turned into Oscar zzzzzz. Not only did one movie win the lion's share of the awards, a result that met expectations precisely, but the other winners were ones that most moviegoers couldn't really argue with. Still, it wasn't the "Lord of the Rings" sweep that made the show boring—there's something exciting about winning so big, and it doesn't happen very often. There was a time when the whole point of watching the Oscars was

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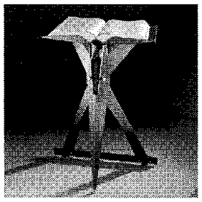

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to make fun of what people wore and what they said. But this year there wasn't much fodder for malicious cackling during the actual ceremony; it was listening to the limo-chasers covering the arrival of the stars outside, on the red carpet, that made me think back to *Mad* magazine's "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions." Maria Menounos, an "Entertainment Tonight" reporter, was practically stumping for the Defense of Marriage Act, gooily exclaiming that Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith were "one of my favorite Hollywood couples," and that Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas were "a true golden Hollywood couple." Menounos, whose dress had a bodice that was essentially two spangly Doritos chips, displayed her own true golden Hollywood couple in a way that a silicone manufacturer would think was a brilliant example of product placement, and she won a spot on the Barbara Walters softball team when she asked Sofia Coppola, "What will it be like for you to win this?"

Inside, in the Kodak Theatre, Billy Crystal, back as host after four years, for some reason felt a need to keep reminding us of that fact, possibly because four years in Hollywood is an eternity. This is the problem with being famous; if you stop being famous for a while, it's as if you never were, which may explain why the Academy decided not to include Penny Singleton—who died last November at the age of ninety-five, and who (in addition to being the voice of Jane Jetson) made twenty-eight "Blondie" movies between 1938 and 1950—in its Dearly Departed video montage.

All the winners behaved terribly well; only two overstayed their welcome and triggered the get-off-the-stage music. And there was little humor in the show, partly because Crystal never had the gift of a Jack Palance moment to play off for the rest of the evening. There were some mildly interesting stretches, though: right after Crystal paused in his tummling to send best wishes to our armed forces overseas, Tom Hanks came onstage, to the orchestral accompaniment of "Hail to the Chief," an homage that put an albeit dignified actor on the same level as people who devote themselves to serving the country. Then there was an illustration of why a parent or parental figure should never talk about his children in public: Bill Murray—sounding like the man who won the award for best makeup and thanked his "gorgeous daughter, for just being gorgeous"—spoke of Sofia Coppola as if she were a contestant in the Miss Teen America Pageant: "Tonight she becomes the first American girl to ever be nominated for director and her film for best picture." What a coincidence: she is also the first American woman to ever be nominated for director and her film for best picture. And it was pretty funny, if you find it funny to watch Hollywood expose its true heart (the heart is that thing that lies under and to the side of the right breast), to see that the woman who won an Oscar for a documentary about the lasting effects of the Chernobyl disaster was seated in the very last row of the orchestra.

The Academy Awards had its best ratings in four years, and some of those numbers may have had to do with viewers' curiosity as to whether anyone would find a way around the newly imposed five-second delay of the broadcast. No one did, and no one tried; like well-trained animals, they needed only to see the muzzle to know that they'd better not bite anyone.

The outrage expressed by Michael K. Powell, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (son of Colin), the day after Janet Jackson's Super Bowl incident was the equivalent of a herd of elephants expressing outrage that there is one flea in their midst. All this talk about children—are Powell and other parents so without resources that they couldn't discuss the "wardrobe malfunction" with their kids and figure out some way to get past it? Families that watch together presumably talk together, too; this was a chance for parents to say, well, that was unfortunate, but it's live TV and things like that can happen, and it's not the end of the world. Children were more likely to be traumatized by a parent's angry reaction, which they could conceivably see as a warning to *them* about the consequences of making a mistake. Unexpected events on live television become funny memories to share with your friends. To try to prevent them, and to be so hellbent on punishing those responsible—as new regulations proposed by Congress are intended to do—isn't doing kids any favors.

Testifying a few weeks ago at hearings before Congress, representatives from the networks all said that they took the issue of indecency seriously. I'm not sure I need to believe this, and I'm also not sure I do believe it. What about NBC's "Fear Factor," in which a woman was recently locked in a coffin with hundreds of tarantulas, and on a regular basis people eat things like cow intestines and guzzle maggot-laced offal purée? What about the excruciatingly humiliating "My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé," whose premise depended on a woman's being willing to carry a lie to extraordinary extremes and drag her entire, unwitting family down with her? And the networks don't balk at broadcasting car races, even though they sometimes involve death—real death, as opposed to some notional and unproved death of innocence.

These examples lie in various places on my personal spectrum of indecency, but they are rife on network television; they are its lifeblood. It's not possible at this point to put the toothpaste back in the tube as far as bad taste is concerned—there *is* no tube, and clocks don't go backward. My sense of indecency has more to do with an over-all atmosphere that encourages or rewards cruelty and the belittling of humanity than with a passing moment of bad judgment; and the fleeting exposure of a breast doesn't fit that description. As far as I know, breasts have never voted against gun control, increased the deficit, or started a war; they just go about their business, feeding and providing pleasure to billions of people, and occasionally causing minor embarrassment.

In this new Jacksonian era, networks will be squeezed tighter than they already are between the watchdogs at the F.C.C. and Congress and the competition on cable TV, which is not subject to the same restrictions. And then there's the Internet, which is no friend to broadcasters: teen-agers and young adults now spend more hours online than they do watching TV. The networks are in a tough spot, but if they capitulate to the pressure to water down what little cleverness and spontaneity are left on television by making their programming supposedly less "offensive," and by overusing the delay tactic during live broadcasts, they will show that New Zealand isn't the only place where sheep outnumber people. ♦

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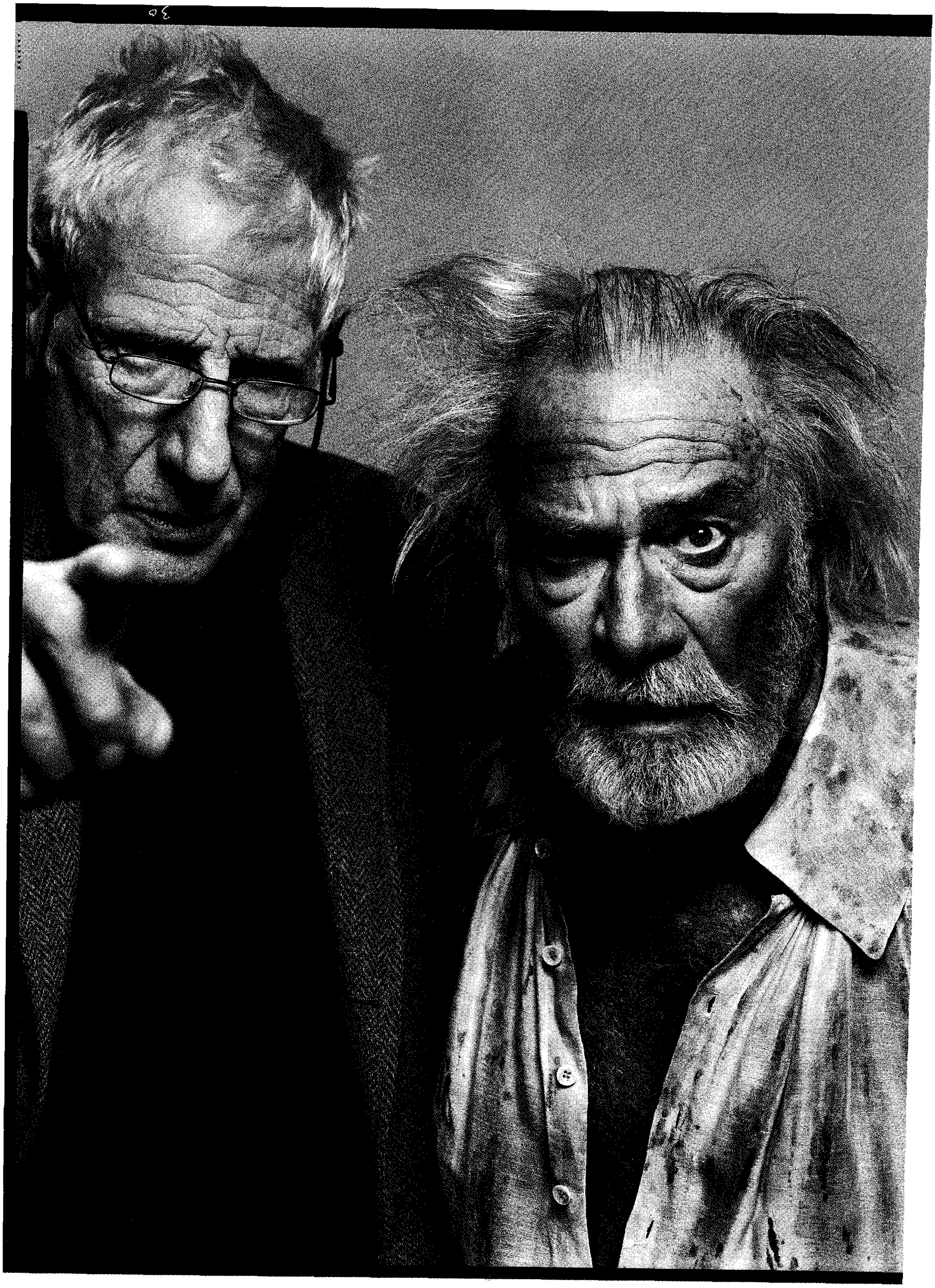

KING FOR A DAY

Two leaders dethroned at Lincoln Center.

BY HILTON ALS

Can an actor who has spent the greater part of his life onstage—an actor who has been lauded in a wide variety of roles both here and abroad—be too old to play King Lear, by the time he gets around to it? Of course, age is not the problem with Christopher Plummer's portrayal of the alternately brilliant and mad king (at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theatre), but it's possible that Plummer's accrued success is. You get the sense, watching this tepid production, that he has simply grown too comfortable with the part of the great actor to bother harnessing his energy to this Mt. Everest of a role.

Lear's tragedy should—as all tragedies do—force us to confront some of life's inevitabilities: the infirmities of old age; the tattered selfhood that we cling to despite the dying of the light; our desperate need to have an effect on the minds and hearts of others. Decency and convention generally prevent us from addressing these miseries outright. It is only when age, madness, or illness takes possession of us—when we are already, in a sense, outcast from society—that we can speak a kind of truth about our self-interest. Shakespeare's Lear bears the weight of age and lives in fear of madness. Stripped of his physical powers, he is free to howl, howl, howl into the fast-approaching night. Nevertheless, the last thing that dies in a ruler is his passion for control. In the play's first act, the King assembles his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia (played drably here by Domini Blythe, Lucy Peacock, and Claire Jullien), to announce that he is dividing his kingdom among them. He declares his purpose this way:

> Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburden'd crawl toward death.

As it happens, however, Lear is not truly ready for his self-imposed retirement. His responsibilities define him, and without the "burden" of negotiation what language would he speak? The King wants to cut a deal: he will not divide his kingdom evenly among his daughters; instead, they will be rewarded with "shadowy forests and with champains rich'd, / with plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads" according to the degree of their love for him. Lear poses the question:

> Tell me, my daughters, —
> Since now we will divest us both of rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state, —
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge.

What he is really asking is not who loves him but who will live for him. His children are his legacy—all that will be left to reflect his increasingly fading self. The trouble is that daughters are not made in their father's image. Shakespeare's hall of mirrors throws Lear back to Lear, but he is unable to see himself as he is. Nor can he see Goneril's and Regan's duplicity when they exaggerate their affection for him. (His demand is vexing to his older daughters, and their resentment makes a certain sense when you consider that, given their class and sex, their father probably had little interest in them before he decided to put his affairs in order.) Lear perceives Cordelia's understated declaration of love—a far cry from her sisters' overblown rhetoric—as a shattering of the mirror he would like her to hold up to his soul. What Cordelia means when she says to her father, "I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less," is "You are you and I am I and somehow, across the chasm of that painful isolation, the isolation inherent in being an individual, there is love." What Lear hears is only ungratefulness for a gift that has nothing to do with giving.

Plummer reacts to Cordelia's statement with more petulance than hurt. And the production goes downhill from there. The director, Jonathan Miller, seems intent on bringing a little more humor to this bare-bones "Lear" than is customary, but in the process he has neglected to cast actors who could tear through Shakespeare's passion and grief with anything approaching passion and grief of their own. The one exception is Barry MacGregor, as the Fool. MacGregor, who is able to marry his own physique to the lyricism of the language, turns in a magical performance. He has the face of a young Donald Pleasence, and the grace of Buster Keaton. Wearing a felt hat crowned with a raggedy feather and walking behind Lear, ready to catch him should he fall further into bathos, MacGregor's Fool manages to energize the audience with his deep concern for his lord. Unlike Plummer, he doesn't expect us to reward him for having taken the part; he simply tries to play it for what it's worth—which is a great deal.

In 1953, broken—and broke—after serving two prison terms for contributing to the delinquency of male minors, the former tennis star Bill Tilden was found dead in his shabby Hollywood apartment. For the half century since then, Tilden's story—one of bright, shining promise followed by professional triumph followed by sexual scandal and ruin—has had a particular resonance, especially among gay audiences. Despite the fact that Tilden almost single-handedly transformed tennis from a nineteen-twenties garden entertainment for the upper classes to a spectator sport and an intellectual pursuit as well (he wrote a number of highly regarded books on the subject), his professional legacy has long been overshadowed by the more gothic elements of his existence: his love

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

The director Jonathan Miller and Christopher Plummer, as King Lear, in New York, February 16, 2004.

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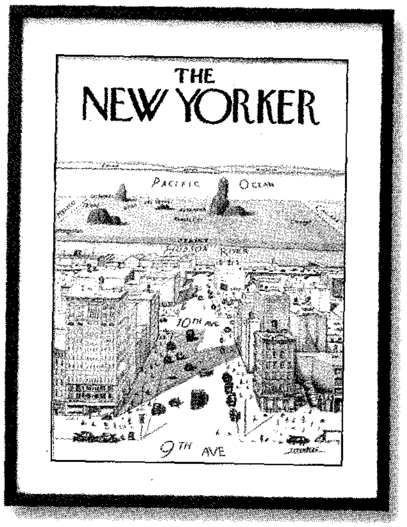

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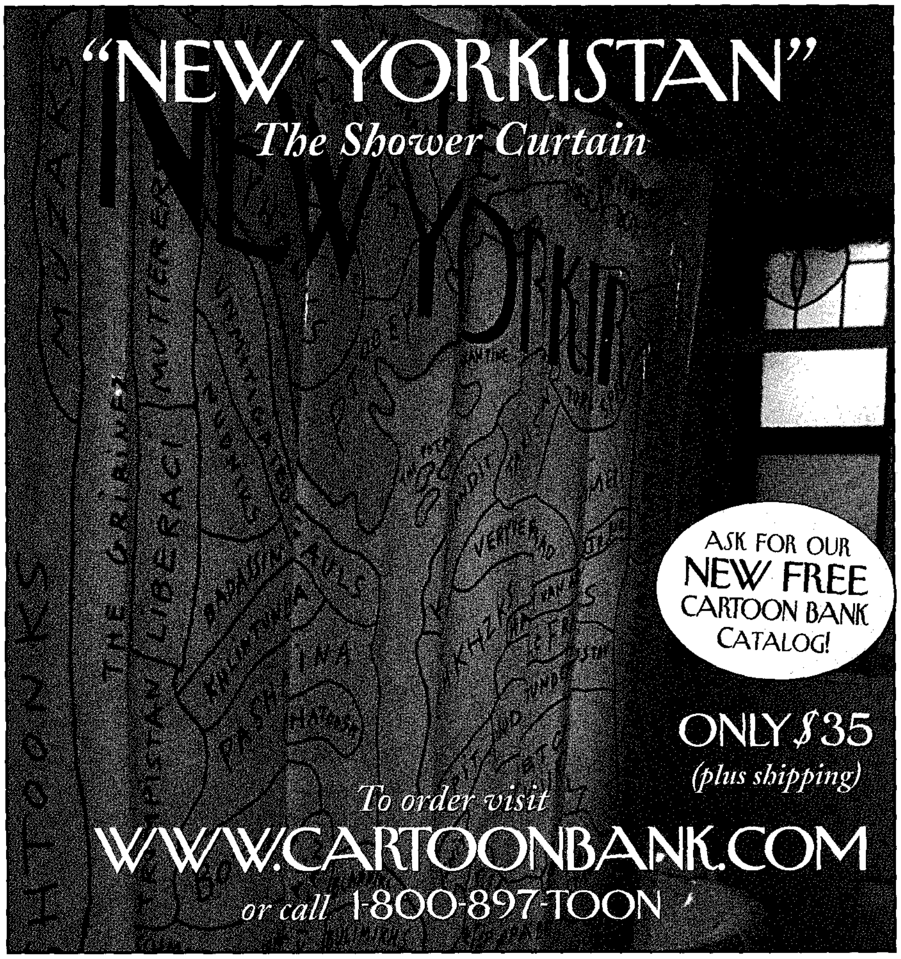

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of young boys, his shame over his own anatomy, and his terror, always, that his duality would be revealed. It is the exploration of that duality—genial, masculine sports hero vs. sensitive and optimistic Peter Pan—that makes A. R. Gurney's "Big Bill" (at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre) such a compelling tapestry of feeling and information.

There's much force to the play—it has strong, clear dialogue, and a fine ear for historical locutions—but there's a hesitancy in Gurney's vision, too. One senses the playwright holding back from the more ghastly and heart-wrenching aspects of Tilden's character, perhaps in a bid to make him palatable to a general audience. He shouldn't have. Any historical character who wears one face in public and another in private provides a rich dramatic conflict—a conflict that Gurney could have ruthlessly exploited. Gurney's anti-hero is less devastating, less exposed than he should be, and this gallant work suffers for it.

In a series of scenes that shift in perspective with near-cinematic fluidity (the play is ably directed by Mark Lamos), we first see Tilden (John Michael Higgins) at the height of his game—a gleaming athlete, as golden as the amateur trophies he so effortlessly collects. In his pitch-perfect tennis whites, Big Bill is a politician both on and off the courts. On a bright Astroturf-like stage (the imaginative set is by John Lee Beatty), he moves deftly about, fielding questions from fans and friends, happy for the attention. Like most politicians, Tilden is defined by his hunger for power. He is undone by it, too. In one of the play's best scenes, he uses his privilege to seduce a young boy who is in search of a mentor; at the same time, we witness Tilden's vulnerability, his desperate need for love, and the shyness that makes him want to hide his own body, reduce it to the size of his juvenile love object's. In a matter of minutes, Big Bill Tilden reverts to Junie, the emotional mama's boy of his childhood. Higgins is a wonderful actor, bathed in a quiet and respectable kind of decency. You can tell that he's thrilled by the emotional trajectories Gurney gives him to play with. Still, his characterization is flawed in exactly the way that this moving play is flawed: by too much politesse and not enough cringe-inducing darkness. ♦

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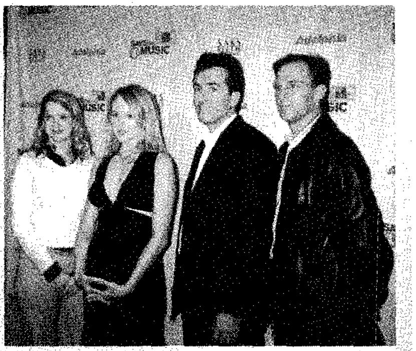

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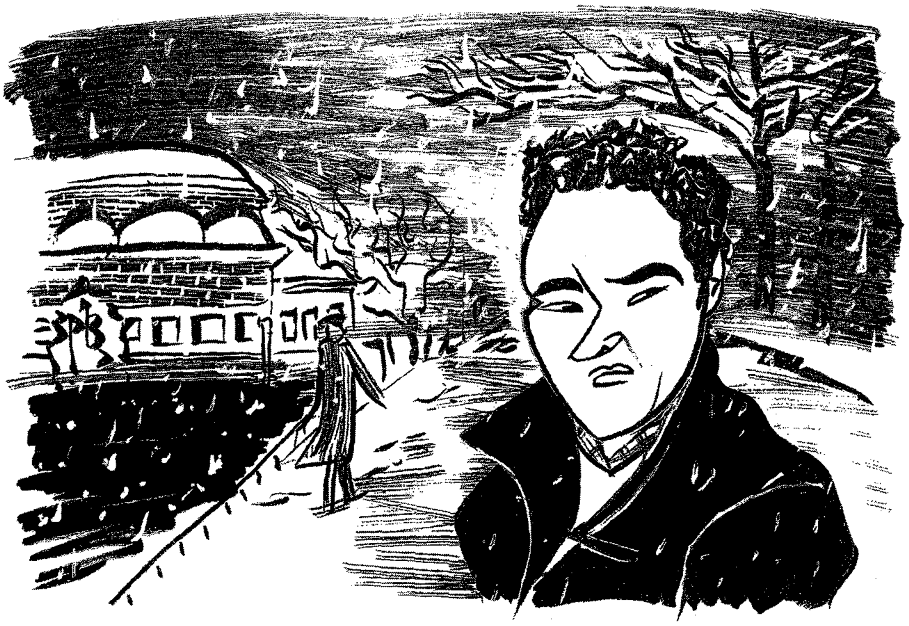
THE CURRENT CINEMA

MEN'S SECRETS

"Distant" and "The Return."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Nine months have passed since the last Cannes Film Festival, and we are still reaping the benefits, or, if you prefer, suffering the consequences. It would appear that the mood du jour on the sunny Riviera last year was a lightly hypnotized flow of daze and dread. Gus Van Sant's "Elephant," which won the Palme d'Or, opened and shut here a couple of months back, Lars Von Trier's "Dogville" will shortly be annoying people in a theatre near you, and now we have "Distant," a picture so stately and becalmed that its undisputed climax comes with the trapping of a very thin mouse.



Mehmet Emin Toprak journeys to Istanbul, in search of a better life.

TOM BACHTELL

Yet the movie does have strange adhesive powers. From the first shot, of a man trekking through a snowy field, with the thin white finger of a minaret poking up in the background, we are on unfamiliar ground. The film was made by the Turkish writer and director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and the plodder in the snow is Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak), who has been laid off from his factory job in the provinces and is hitching a ride to Istanbul in search of better things. He goes to stay with his cousin Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir), and you can tell how eagerly Mahmut is awaiting his kinsman from the fact that he completely forgets to stay home and let the poor guy in. That's the hook: throw together two mopers, well into the woods of middle age, and see what happens. If this were a Billy Wilder picture, they would bloom in each other's company, but this is Istanbul, under foul and glutinous skies, and what we have is a pair of Walter Matthaus and no Jack Lemmon.

Mahmut is a commercial photographer, and he would probably class himself as an intellectual, although in truth he belongs to a lesser, more widespread, and more entertaining species: the intellectual wanna-be. He has a study seething with books, and a peppery beard ideal for thoughtful stroking, but when a friend invites him to a philosophical gathering he asks, "Will there be any girls?" What Özdemir's coolly hemmed-in performance suggests is not so much a mind burdened by the weight of ideas—a staple of European literary inquiry—as

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a man who has fewer ideas than he would care to admit, plus a body aghast at its faltering appetites. There is a beautiful shot of Mahmut held sharply in the camera's gaze, stuck fast in ruefulness, while behind him, out of focus but still readable as a shifting, voluptuous shape, an unnamed lover removes her clothes. The offer is there, but he cannot respond, and, after her departure, he sadly seduces himself.

The grief of sexual failure, with its presagings of death, is a subject rarely touched upon by movies, for obvious reasons. People don't pay ten bucks to be warned of their shrivelling desires; they pay ten bucks to witness two or more flab-free characters writhe seamlessly on creamy sheets, their approaching bliss invariably signalled by the rising moan of a saxophone on the soundtrack, as if Kenny G. were hiding under the bed. Contrast the lumpen Yusuf, glancing at the slit skirt of a woman on the subway (she catches the glance and moves away), or the childless Mahmut discovering that his ex-wife is leaving for Canada with her new partner and planning to have a baby. What is most winning about "Distant," however, is that it can peer past the grief and find a scrap of comedy. The two cousins sit and gaze at Mahmut's huge flat-screen TV; their choice of viewing is Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker," possibly the least promising film that you could choose for an evening of family harmony. In particular, they are watching the infamous trolley scene, in which three taciturn men ride a clanking railroad into a land of desolation known as "the Zone." Yusuf considers this, gives up in despair, and goes to bed, whereupon the furtive Mahmut waits a minute, then ejects the videotape and substitutes another. The TV screen is suddenly awash with pornography, as cheap and cheerful as it comes.

I know how he feels. This is not to disparage Tarkovsky, whose movies are unmatched in grave remorselessness, but there is no dishonor, whether we be porno junkies or thriller buffs, in confessing to a lust for sensation. I saw "Distant" soon after seeing "School of Rock," and the two pictures struck me as a flawless double bill, each forcing you to thirst after the other. "Distant" certainly brims with the anxiety of influence; it is more than prepared to match the challenging

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slowness of "Stalker" but also keen to grub around in petty familiarities from which Tarkovsky might have averted his eyes—Mahmut cursing at the crumbs of tobacco that Yusuf leaves on the living-room floor, or driving through a landscape that shouts out to be photographed but deciding, with a shrug, that he can't be bothered to stop. And the moral is: you *can* keep your brow high, but it's a hell of a sweat.

Yet the visions that linger, after "Distant" has drawn to its sensationally grumpy close, are as startling as anything that Tarkovsky devised in "The Sacrifice" or "Mirror." As Yusuf walks down by the docks (he dreams in vain of a job at sea), the camera follows him patiently through the snow and comes upon a ship—rusted, half sunken, tilted to one side, and basically left to die. Yusuf hardly notices it, but it's like some relic of a forgotten civilization, or a frozen mammoth. Finally, there is a heart-seizing scene at the airport, where Mahmut goes to see off his ex-wife without wishing to be seen himself. At one point, she looks in his direction, but he slips behind a pillar, like a shadow or a spy, and she is left, as ever, unconvinced of his presence. If you are pained by a lost love, or you can't get it up, or you can never find anywhere to have a smoke these days, or you simply enjoy shivering and stamping in the winter of your discontent, then here is the movie for you.

There is more emotion, a great salty wave of the stuff, on show in the opening scene of "The Return" than in the whole of "Distant." A group of kids clamber to the top of a wooden tower and launch themselves into the chilly water below. The youngest boy, Ivan (Ivan Dobronravov), is too chicken, or too wise, to jump, and he stays up there, shaking with cold and shame, until his mother climbs up and folds him in her arms. It is not often that you feel drained after ten minutes in a cinema, so how to account for the gusts of love and fear that sweep across this small Russian picture? Well, it is the first film to be directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev, and what it shares with other coruscating débuts, from "The Four Hundred Blows" to "Badlands," is a sense that it *had* to be made. There is a controlled wildness at the heart of such movies,

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whose narratives ask to be handled as delicately as explosives.

Eleven-year-old Ivan and his teenage brother, Andrey (Vladimir Garin), live with their ravishing mother, as well as their unspeaking grandmother, in a house that feels as serene as a monastery and as barren as a jail. Into this peaceful setup comes their father (Konstantin Lavronenko), a man with no name, returned, after eleven years, from an ordeal—war, perhaps, or exile, or imprisonment. He suits the place, having the cropped features and the ceaseless practicality of a soldier, but also the disturbing core of certainty that we associate with the devout. (He first appears foreshortened, asleep on a bed, naked from the waist up, in a straight steal from Mantegna's "Dead Christ.") After a rest, however, he declares that he will be taking his sons, whom he barely knows, on a fishing trip.

Zvyagintsev is no sentimentalist, and the journey he describes is a voyage less of discovery than of bafflement, shot through with every strain of desperation—a car sucked into the mud, say, with Andrey howling at his dad for landing them in this mess and getting whacked against the side of the car. Two minutes later, though, he is radiant with triumph, having taken the wheel and driven the vehicle clear, and once again our feelings are put through a juddering mill, as if we were children ourselves. By the time the boys and their father reach a deserted island, having found a boat, recaulked it, and rowed through fog, we know that they are drifting into a showdown.

As Andrey and Ivan play on the shore, or in the mushroom-rich forest, their father digs a hole and unearths a suitcase. Inside the case is a box, but that is as far as the movie goes in its game of Russian dolls. The box guards its secret as closely as the one that Catherine Deneuve's client displayed, with conspiratorial pride, in "Belle de Jour," and we are encouraged to reflect that something of consuming value to one man may be worthless to another, and that, had the boys ever opened the box, they might have tossed it overboard as trash. Forget buried treasure; their father is mystery enough, and the hold that he exerts on them, in his twin guise of tyrant and teacher, will be burned into their young souls like the image on a photographic plate. If there is a murmur of allegory here, of the Russia that was ruled with unsmiling rigor for seventy years or so—as brief, in historical terms, as the scorched and stormy week experienced by Ivan and Andrey—then Zvyagintsev is too smart and subtle to press the point. Decide for yourself, but be quick: "The Return" is now in mid-run at Lincoln Plaza, and you must seek it out before it leaves town. ♦

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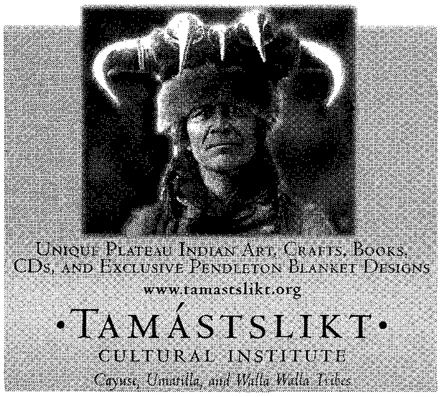
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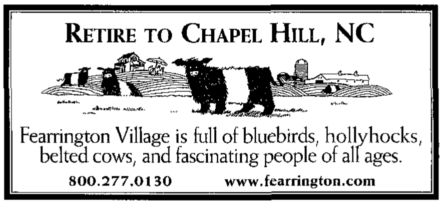
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THE BACK PAGE BY PAUL RUDNICK

THE GOSPEL OF DEBBIE

Recent works like "The Passion of the Christ" and "The Da Vinci Code" seek to illuminate the life of Jesus. Not long ago, an additional text was discovered in an ancient linen backpack found in a cave outside Jerusalem, surrounded by what appeared to be early-Roman candy wrappers and covered with stickers reading "I ♥ All Faiths" and "Ask Me About Hell." A parchment diary found inside the backpack appears to contain the musings of one Debbie of Galilee. Many of the pages are still being translated from high-school Aramaic; here are some persuasive excerpts:

October 5

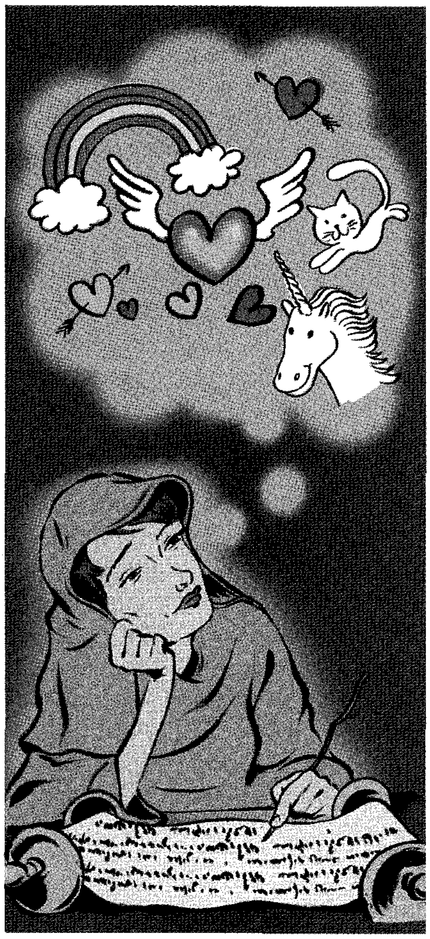
I saw him in the marketplace! Everyone says that he's the son of God, but I don't care one way or the other because he's just so CUTE!!! O.K., he's not hot like a gladiator or a centurion, but he's really sensitive and you can tell that he thinks about things and then goes, "Be nice to people," and I'm like, that is SO TRUE, and I wonder if he's seeing anyone!

October 21

Everyone says that he's just totally good and devoted to all humanity and that he was sent to save us and that's why he doesn't have time for a girlfriend, although I swear I saw Mary Magdalene doodling in the sand with a stick, writing "Mrs. Jesus Christ" and "Merry Xmas from Mary and Jesus Christ and All the Apostles," with little holly leaves all around it. And I'm like, Mary, are you dating Jesus? and she says, no, he's just helping me, and I'm like, you mean with math? and she's like, no, to not be such a whore. And I said, but that is so incredibly *sweet*, and we both screamed and talked about whether we like him better when he's healing the lame or with a ponytail.

December 25

I wanted to get him the perfect thing for his birthday, so I asked Matthew and he said, well, myrrh is good, but then Luke said, oh please, everyone always gives him myrrh, I bet he wishes those wise men had brought scented candles, some imported marmalade, and a nice box of notecards. So I go, O.K., what about accessories, like a new rope belt or clogs or like I could make him a necklace with his name spelled out in little clay letters? and Mark said, I love that, but Luke rolled his eyes and said, Mark, you are just such an Assyrian. So I go to see Mary, Jesus' mom, and she said that Jesus doesn't need gifts, that he just wants all of us to love God and be better people, but I asked, what about a sweater? and she said medium.



ZOHAR LAZAR

January 2

Oh my God, oh my God, I couldn't believe it, but I was right there, and Jesus used only five loaves of bread and two fish to feed thousands of people, and it was so beautiful and miraculous, and my brother Ezekiel said, whoa, Jesus has invented canapés and I said shut up! And then my best friend Rachel asked, I wonder if he could make my hair really shiny, and I said, you are so disgusting, Jesus shouldn't waste his time on your vanity, and then Jesus smiled at me and I'm telling you, those last seven pounds, the stubborn ones, they were totally gone! And I spoke unto the angry Roman mob and I said, behold these thighs! Jesus has made me feel better about me!

March 12

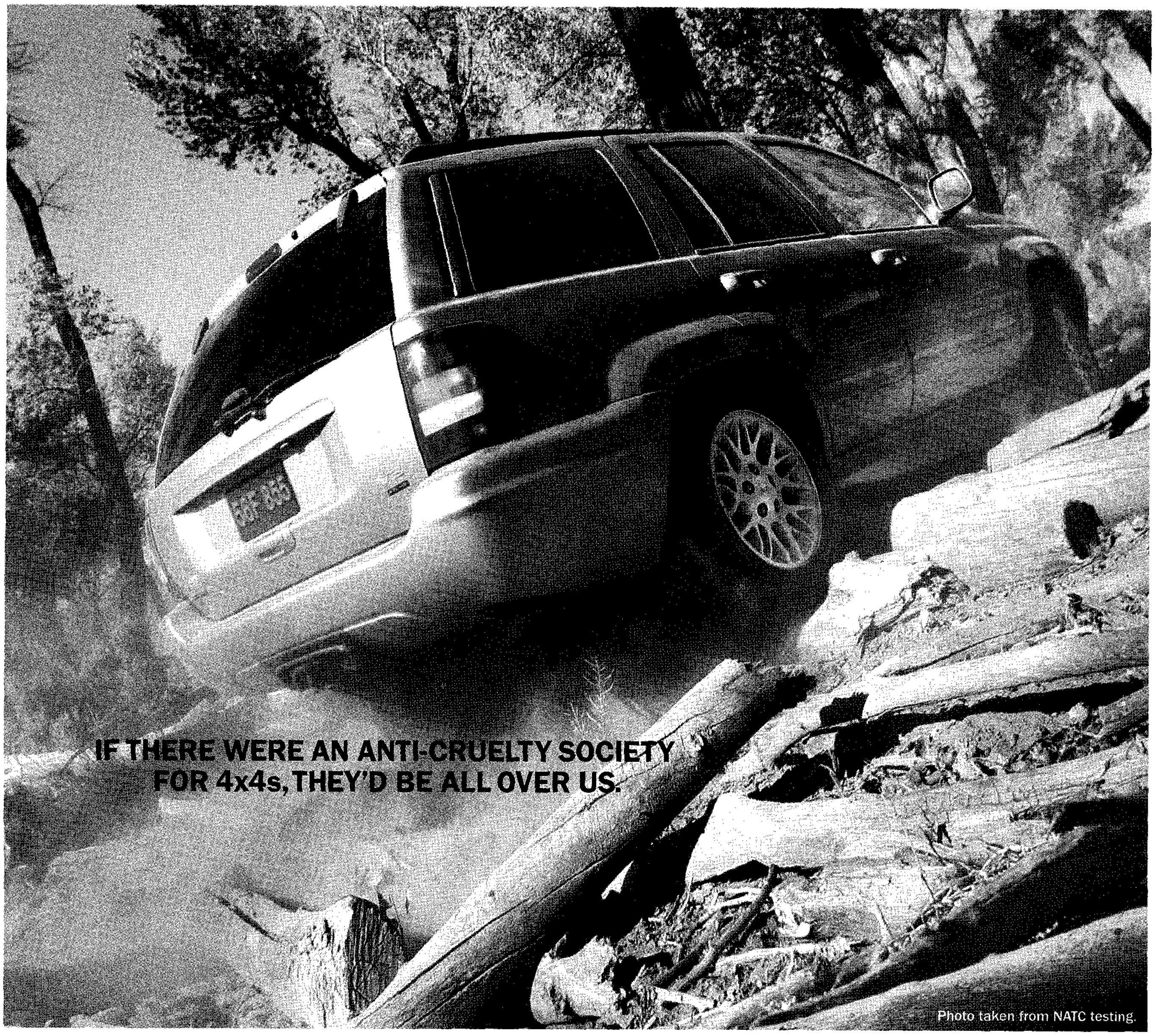
Everyone is just getting so mean. They're all going, Debbie, he is so not divine, Debbie, you'll believe anything, Debbie, what about last year when you were worshipping ponchos? And I so don't trust that Judas Iscariot, who's always staring at me when I walk to the well and he's saying, hey, Deb, nice jugs, and I'm like, oh ha ha ha, get some oxen.

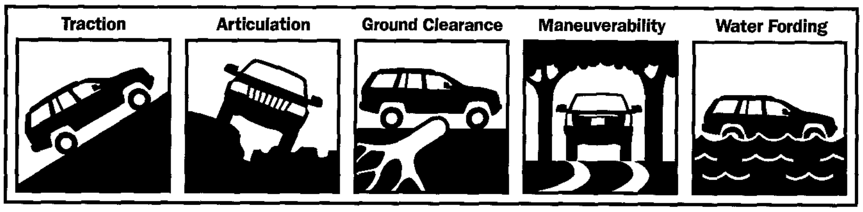
April 5

So Mary Magdalene tells me that Jesus and all the apostles had this big party and that it got really intense and Jesus drank from this golden goblet and now it's missing and the restaurant is like, this is why there's a surcharge.

April 23

It's all over. And it's been terrible and amazing and I don't know what any of it means or who's right and who's wrong but maybe I'll figure it out later. Anyway, I'll always remember what Jesus said to me. He said, Debbie, I can foresee that someday you'll meet someone, someone wonderful, but for right now let's at least think about college. ♦


IF THERE WERE AN ANTI-CRUELTY SOCIETY FOR 4x4s, THEY'D BE ALL OVER US.
Photo taken from NATC testing.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